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ABSTRACT

Focusing on the notion that the author supplies the words in a text while the reader supplies the meaning, this issue contains essays that combine literary theories with classroom practices. Following an introduction by R. E. Fitch, articles include "Teaching a Western: Jack Schaefer's 'Shane'" (J. R. Ruff); "Pragmatic Criticism in Teaching 'The Pearl'" (J. E. Strzepek); "Exploring Line and Circle Imagery: An Entrance into 'Moby Dick'" (M. J. Atlas); "A Curious Triangle and the Double-Entry Notebook, or How a Theory of Language Can Help Us Teach Critical Reading and Writing" (A. E. Berthoff); "Exercises in the Criticism of Narrative for the First Few Days in an Introductory Literature Course" (J. L. Battersby); "Can We Teach the Latest Literary Theories to College Freshmen?" (J. J. Sosnoski); "An Experiment in Criticism in the College Classroom: Making Use of F. R. Leavis" (W. E. Cain); "Critical Theory and the English Classroom" (B. Bashford); "The Abyss of Interpretation" (R. E. Fitch); "Evaluation of a Course in 'Critical Analysis' for High School Students" (S. G. Bennett); "Needed: A Morphology of Literary Criticism for the Classroom Teacher" (C. L. Thompson); "Literary Structuralism: An Introductory Explanation and Some Educational Implications" (G. Peterson); "Barthes and the Pleasure of Reading" (W. Sondey); "When Theories Bind: A Contrast of Modes" (L. Burrell); and "Surfeit: A Bibliography" (R. E. Fitch). In addition, four continuing columns are included: "Research in the Teaching of English Language Arts: 'Research in Composition in the 1980s Worth Noting'" (D. L. Bergdahl); "Books for Young Adults: What a Conference!" (H. K. Davis); "Teaching English in the Elementary School" (S. Hale); and "Teaching English in the Junior High/Middle School: Using Photography to Teach Point of View and Plot in Literature" (R. Sharrer). (JD)

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in the English CLASSROOM

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FOCUS: TEACHING ENGLISH LANGUAGE ARTS

Volume VII

Winter 1981

Number 2

LITERARY THEORY IN THE ENGLISH CLASSROOM

Guest Editor: Raymond E. Fitch

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INTRODUCTION

The Enduring Picnic

Northrop Frye once borrowed an inviting simile to describe the literary work. He wrote: "It has been said of Boehme that his books are like a picnic to which the author brings the words and the reader the meaning. The remark may have been intended as a sneer at Boehme, but it is an exact description of all works of literary art without exception."¹ We may be inclined to sneer, in turn, at Frye's dogmatic description of the literary work (and, by inference, our work) as a picnic, but his is an exact description of the work's invitation to contemporary literary theory. The picnic has drawn a bewildering diversity of theories, modes, and strategies of criticism or interpretation to a setting that is adequately suggested by Geoffrey Hartman's recent title, Criticism in the Wilderness. In fact critical theory has reached a sloughy place in which, as Wayne Booth observed, "the most paradoxical claim to make would be that one had found some common ground on which we all can stand while we conduct our stormy debates about interpretation and methods of interpretation."²

In a sense we make that claim here by attempting to bring literary theories to the common ground of classroom practice and thereby to invite teachers and their students to the theorists' picnic. In doing so we have not sought demonstrations of procedures that fully excavate the meanings of particular works, nor have we sought contributions representing every denomination of contemporary theorists. Though we might concede that behind every theory of literature lies a potential classroom stance, we have left it to each contributor to advocate the convergence or intersection of theory with classroom practice as he or she perceives it. Consequently, in some of these essays theory is fully merged with practical illustration; in others the practical implications of theory are merely suggested, though they are no less provocative. So in arranging these essays, as we do, from the more fully applied, toward the front, to the more fully theoretical, nearer the back, we mean only to guide the reader's attention, not his or her evaluation.

Ray Fitch

¹Northrop Frye, Fearful Symmetry: A Study of William Blake (Boston, 1967), p. 427.

²Wayne C. Booth, Critical Understanding: The Powers and Limits of Pluralism (Chicago, 1979), pp. 5-6.

Teaching a Western: Jack Schaefer's Shane

by
Joseph R. Ruff

Larry McMurty, writer, Texan, and sometimes ranchhand, once wrote that "as a form, the Western was frozen long ago--but like mastodon meat it is apparently still edible to the dwindling, passively reactionary band of readers who insist on digging it out."¹ The kind of Western he here refers to is the popular Western of writers like Louis Lamour, Luke Short, and Ray Hogan, the equivalent of the grade-B movies at yesterday's Saturday matinee. The world they create is an unchanging and uncomprising one, inhabited by tough men who settle all arguments at the point of a gun. As for the readers who exist on this diet of mastodon meat, they are a mixed crew, consisting of truck drivers, ball players, theology students, a few professors, and an occasional President of the United States. Harry Truman and Dwight Eisenhower once read Westerns; Randy Jones and Gary Player, the pitcher and the putter, still do. Although Henry Kissinger probably never read one, he has used the Westerner as an exemplary figure to define the Kissinger brand of personal diplomacy:

I've always acted alone. Americans admire that enormously. Americans admire the cowboy leading the caravan alone astride his horse, the cowboy entering a village or city alone on his horse. . . A Wild West Tale, if you like.

Kissinger was certainly right in his conception. Some myths may die, but the myth of the American West can scarcely be said to have faded away. If we can take seriously the semiotics of fashion and advertising--and I suspect we can--the myth still stands at the center of the American consciousness, is, in fact, firmly embedded in our popular institutions.

Only the Western films has been more successful than the popular Western novel in keeping that myth alive, but Western movies have pretty much disappeared from the big screen into reruns on the small box during the early hours of the morning. If the myth continues to survive, it will probably do so because of that "passively reactionary band" who cannot change to a diet of spy thrillers or science fiction. The frozen form of the popular Western is just what they want.

Critics other than McMurty have long informed us that Westerns get written according to a formula and reader expectations are such that "originality is to be welcomed only in the degree that it intensifies the expected experience without altering it."² So it is that the popular Western presents us with stereotyped characters, standardized action, and plots developed from no more than a dozen stock situations. There are good guys and bad guys who engage in conflict over disputed territory until they face off in a blazing showdown. In this formula, nothing of consequence is left to the reader's

imagination. Yet even with the restrictions imposed by formula and convention, some writers have been able to create minor masterpieces in the Western genre.

One such masterpiece that I have had some success in teaching to classes of introductory fiction is Jack Schaefer's Shane, a work which shares many of the strengths of the popular novel suggested by Ray Merlock in a previous issue of Focus: it is well-organized, richly detailed, easily read.³ It is also--and this may be more significant than I care to admit--short, running to less than two-hundred pages.

This aside, teaching a Western of any kind to today's generation of secondary school and college students (those east of the Great Divide, at any rate) requires some teacher-talk about the American West. I don't mean that one need lecture on the significance of the frontier in American history, although that could be made relevant, too; what I have in mind is simply talk about what it meant to be a "hired man on horseback," what it took to live, work, and survive as rancher or farmer on the plains and in the valleys of the American West. A teacher need also talk about the literary West, especially the development of the frontier hero from his beginnings in Fenimore Cooper's Leatherstocking Tales through his eventual transformation into a sagebrush hero.

A question that frequently arises in my classes is addressed to the problem of realism, to the reality of what takes place between the covers of a popular Western. My standard response is that the popular Western bears the same relationship to the facts of Western life as the medieval romance bears to the facts of feudal life--there is a relationship but it is an oblique one. Realism in the Western, as in the medieval romance, exists only on the surface; at the deepest level, most medieval romances and most Westerns turn out to be parables of good and evil. Certainly Shane does; it can in fact be read as an allegory whose central character, a "Man of Destiny" (like Zane Grey's Lassiter), mysteriously appears out of the Grand Teton Mountains and after righting all wrongs just as mysteriously disappears into those same mountains. Jack Schaefer invites, actually demands, an allegorical interpretation of his novel. Most of my students reject the applicability of terms like messiah or savior to Shane but they can see the reasonableness of James K. Folsom's writing that

it becomes clear that the world of the Western town in which the story of Shane is unfolding is a symbolic one in which Schaefer can present a basically allegorical concern. For Shane is a walking figure of God's providence in the confusing world of flux. At the beginning of the novel the forces of good (the homesteaders) are at the mercy of those of evil (the cattle baron); the arrival of Shane changes the whole picture, not merely by giving another gun to the weaker side but by symbolically affirming the inevitability of its victory.⁴

That Shane is something more than the ordinary cowhand turned gunfighter is clear from the start. Students swiftly note the kinds of words and phrases used by the narrator and other characters in describing him: mysterious,

dangerous, unapproachable, stern, chilling, forbidding, terrible, a marked man. A student once remarked that perhaps the mysteriousness of Shane is best summed up in the narrator's inability to fully comprehend what is most frightening about the stranger's appearance: "I would be frightened, as I had tried to explain to mother, not at Shane himself, but at the suggestion it always gave me of things in the human equation beyond my comprehension." But students are also quick to point out that although Shane may be mysterious and potentially dangerous, he presents no threat to the Starrett family and the other homesteaders in the valley, that he can be a benevolent figure. At another place in the narrative, Bob Starrett describes the effect Shane has had upon his parents: "They were more alive, more vibrant, like they wanted to show more what they were, when they were with him. I could appreciate that because I felt the same way myself."

The character of Shane, the novel itself, takes shape from Bob Starrett's telling. Through his eyes, the eyes of memory as it were, the events unfold: he reports what he sees, and because he cannot see everything, he reports what others have seen. He even provides us with an historical context. The novel takes place in Wyoming, three years after the "terrible winter of '86," in the parched "summer of '89," the year of the Johnson County War, paralleled in the novel by the homesteaders' conflict with the cattle baron, Luke Fletcher, who, as his real-life counterpart did, rules the territory like a feudal baron. It is Bob, too, who furnishes us with every formulaic necessity, from the opening miniature (i.e., the initial description of the hero) through the central conflict to the final resolution of the novel. And here Shane becomes what would be described in German as unheimlich, "uncanny, strange":

He was tall and terrible there in the road, looming up gigantic in the mystic half-light. He was the man I saw that first day, a stranger, dark and forbidding, forging his lone way out of an unknown past in the utter loneliness of his own immovable and instinctive defiance. He was the symbol of all the dim, formless imaginings of danger and terror in the untested realm of human potentialities beyond my understanding.

In fashioning his narrator, Schaefer creates a character who is not especially complex but whose perceptiveness seems to belie his age. "How old is Bob Starrett?", a student asks. Schaefer does not tell us; we can only surmise that he is young, telling the story at some later time in his life, but precisely how much later remains unclear. Students will notice, however, that Bob is at least old enough to refer to himself as having been "a kid then, barely topping the backboard of father's old chuckwagon," when Shane rode into the valley. At the end of the novel Bob conveys a sense of time's having passed by emphasizing that the events of the summer have undergone a series of retellings and that speculations about the man called Shane have become legend. Yet all of this could have taken place in a matter of weeks, or a few months at the most. As to his perceptiveness, Bob is a moralizer. Hardly anything that attracts his attention escapes his moralizing, and he has this tendency in common with the rest of the characters. Given that allegory has already been admitted into the discussion, perhaps it is gratuitous to quibble about the moralizing of the various characters, including, and especially, Shane: "A gun is as good--and as bad--as the man who carries it."

"There's no going back from a killing." "Tell him no man need be ashamed of being beat by Shane." But most students remain undisturbed by these "bits of platitudinous wisdom."⁵

Eventually what students, not unreasonably, identify with and sympathize with is Bob's nostalgia, his longing to impart the experience of a time past recovery. He has been--and this theme is traditional in many Western novels--"growing up with the country." He has been initiated into the world of manhood, as it is defined in the Western, learning not only from his father but more specifically from "the man who rode into our little valley out of the heart of the great glowing West and when his work was done rode back whence he had come and he was Shane."

The "great glowing West" is vividly captured in the film version of Jack Schaefer's novel. Time and budget permitting, I try to use this film as a basis for a comparative discussion of the two forms, how one may succeed, for instance, where the other may fail. I usually begin such a discussion by asking relatively uncomplicated questions about plot and character. We, the students and I, find that the plot remains substantially the same in the film but that dialogue changes and characterizations differ. Indirect discourse in the novel may become direct discourse in the film: a piece of narrative exposition by Bob Starrett in the novel is transformed into a set speech by Ryker (Luke Fletcher) in the film. The physical image of Shane is changed from a figure of darkness (black hat, black clothes) to one of light (white hat and buckskins), and Wilson, the hired gunfighter, actually picks up some of the characteristics attributed to Shane in the novel. Why does this happen? Why, if names are so important in Westerns--which they are--does Bob Starrett become Joey Starrett? Why does Stark Wilson become Jack Wilson? Why is Luke Fletcher's name changed to the singular Ryker? Why, finally, does the screenwriter use the name Torrey for the character Ernie Wright, Wilson's victim, when Frank Torrey is an entirely different character in the novel? How does the film, since its plot is the stuff of many low-budget Westerns, keep from becoming mere "horse opera?" How significant are the qualities that the film derives from the novel? What happens to the mood in transforming a novel into a film? At this point, it's a good thing to remind students that there is a text (the screenplay) underlying what is viewed on the screen, a fact often ignored in the rush to examine visual effects.

Some of the above questions are probably unanswerable, but a class (and a teacher) usually manage a few more or less informed guesses. Other questions will occur to other students and teachers, but the one unavoidable question, the one that can turn a class into a critical debating society is which succeeds better, Shane the novel or Shane the film. Teachers won't be surprised to discover that most students prefer the film, although there are always some who say that they prefer the "original." The degree of preference seems to be determined by which comes first, the film or the novel. I have tried it both ways, but I think the best way is to "read the book, see the picture."

Let me add that Shane, viewed as film or read as novel, may be for some students a last chance to ingest a significant part of our usable mythological past. Shane, as the archetypal outlaw, can never be more than a temporary member of the community. Once he casts off his "crude work clothes" and re-arms himself, "dressed as he was that first day" with "belt and holster and

gun," he has taken an irreversible step in alienating himself from that community which he has served. Shane knows that after he has completed his task he will be regarded as a potential threat by the community. He understands better than Bob or Joe or Marian why he can never return to that homestead in the valley and resume his old role as the Starrett's hired hand. The last glimmer of Shane disappearing into the Grand Tetons reminds us of the truth of his code: "There's no going back from a killing."

NOTES

¹Quoted in The Washington Post, 27 September 1977, B4, col. 2.

²Robert Warshow, The Immediate Experience (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday and Company, Inc. 1962), p. 85.

³"Approach to Trash: American Popular Culture in the Classroom," Focus: Teaching American Literature, 5, No. 2 (Winter, 1979), 29.

⁴The American Western Novel (New Haven, Conn." College and University Press, 1966), p. 127.

⁵The phrase is Folsom's, The American Western Novel, p. 126.

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Pragmatic Criticism in Teaching The Pearl

by
Joseph E. Strzepek

John Steinbeck's The Pearl was first published in 1945 in Woman's Home Companion under the title "The Pearl of the World." It was published as a novel with its present title in 1947, the same year it was made into a movie. Since then, it has become one of Steinbeck's most widely read novels, apparently as popular in British schools as it is in American schools.¹ Although it is a simple story, it stimulates varying interpretations and evaluations.² It is usually read in high schools, but most junior high students could also read it, at least at the level of its narrative.

In the Mirror and the Lamp, M.H. Abrams uses the term "pragmatic" to describe criticism which tries to interpret and evaluate literature according to the ways it affects its readers: morally, psychologically, sociologically, philosophically, aesthetically. The Pearl could be analyzed from a number of critical approaches, but it seems to invite the pragmatic. Consider Steinbeck's brief preface:

In the town they tell the story of the great pearl--how it was found and how it was lost again. They tell of Kino, the fisherman, and of his wife, Juana, and of the baby, Coyotito. And because the story has been told so often, it has taken root in every man's mind. And, as with all retold tales that are in people's hearts, there are only good and bad things and black and white things and good and evil things and no in-between anywhere.

If this story is a parable, perhaps everyone takes his own meaning from it and read his own life into it. In any case, they say in the town that . . .³

Since parables are stories which teach a lesson or communicate a moral, and since we are told that it may be regarded as a parable, the questions which come immediately to mind are: What is the lesson of The Pearl, what does it teach, how can everyone take "his own meaning from it and read his own life into it"? These of course, are among the primary questions raised by pragmatic critics. In this article, I will show how these questions apply especially to The Pearl. Before I begin to discuss the use of these questions, however, I will present a precis of The Pearl, which will itself be a partial answer to the question of what The Pearl teaches.

The Pearl is the story of how Kino, a young Mexican Indian from a brush hut village on the west coast of the Gulf of California, struggles against the racism, ignorance, poverty, and fear to which his people had been subject

since the arrival of the Spanish conquistadores. Kino desperately needs to find pearls worth enough to pay the greedy, corrupt European doctor from the town adjacent to his village to treat his baby son Coyotito for a scorpion bite. He dives deep into the waters of the gulf and finds a huge, magnificent pearl. Joyfully, Kino envisions a new life for himself and his family. Now he can have respectability: he and Juana can be married in a formal church wedding, can afford new clothes. Now he can have power: a harpoon, even a rifle--the conqueror's weapon. Most of all, they can have knowledge: an education for his son. Coyotito's literacy would protect all the Indians from the white power structure in the town--the doctor, the collusive pearl buyers, and even the priest, who preaches against change.

Kino quickly discovers, however, that the pearl's potential as a source of good fortune is endangered by the envy and evil it arouses in other men. The doctor comes to force a distressing treatment on Coyotito; Kino is attacked by thieves; the pearl buyers refuse to pay him a fair price for the pearl; and when Juana tries to throw the pearl back into the ocean to save them from further danger, he smashes her in the face and kicks her in the side. So Kino's potential for violence is also evoked. After he kills an attacker in self-defense, after his brush house is burned to cinders and his canoe smashed by new faceless enemies, Kino flees with his family on foot, hoping to sell the pearl in one of the cities to the north.

They are followed by two trackers and a rifleman. After an exhaustive flight, the cornered Kino turns in the night, hides Juana and Coyotito, and stalks his hunters with his knife. At the instant that the rifleman shoots off into the dark at what he thinks is the whine of a coyote, Kino stabs him, and with the rifle kills the other two trackers. The first shot, however, had killed his baby son.

The next day, in full view of the village, Kino and Juana return with their dead child. They walk to the edge of the gulf, where Kino "drew back his arm and flung the pearl with all his might" (p. 117), returning it to the ocean floor.

What might students learn from reading "The Pearl"; how might they, as the audience, be affected? I will generalize from my own reactions and those of students other teachers and I have taught.

Students learn what happens to Kino and Juana and Coyotito in Lapaz. They learn that some men can be heroic, simple, and good, that others can be greedy, evil, despicable. They may become emotionally involved with Kino and Juana and grieve with them for their child's death. They admire Kino's courage and Juana's womanly strength. They hate the doctor, the pearl buyers, and the trackers. Many gain moral insights into the forces of good and evil in men's lives, psychological insights into the nature of the human character, and sociological insights into the tensions between ethnic groups. Some students may wonder if Kino should have kept the pearl and continued to the north to sell it, others if he should have sold the pearl at the price originally offered by the buyers. Many speculate about Kino's life after he throws away the pearl, wonder why he keeps the rifle. Others wonder about Kino's returning to his village to begin life over again: why he returns and what will happen to him.

The pragmatic teacher can find many ways to help his students relate The Pearl to their own lives. He can ask them what they would have done if they had found a valuable gem, if a neighbor or a friend had found one. Or if he had just won the Irish Sweepstakes. In inquiring into the "lesson" of the novel, the teacher will probably find that some students will think they are being told not to challenge the establishment, others will project and conclude that if one does decide to challenge a hostile power structure, he should organize with those who share his cause, rather than attempt to fight alone, as Kino does.

What is the theme of "The Pearl"? What is its thesis?

These are fundamental pragmatic questions, not unrelated to the question of what the novel teaches. I think that the major theme of the novel is Man's desire to shape his own destiny, to expand his potential in conflict with tradition, religion, other men, and his own limitations of ignorance and mortality. Kino, as do Icarus, Prometheus, Melville's Ahab, Hemingway's Old Man, reaches beyond his grasp. The thesis of The Pearl, how the theme is treated, its conflicts resolved, is that it is in the nature of man to struggle against, and often be crushed by, forces greater than himself; through the struggle and the tragedy of defeat, however, he is ennobled and enlightened. It is absurd to ask what Kino would have done had he known that the pearl would bring disaster. Eve was warned not to eat the fruit of the tree in Eden's garden. Oedipus is warned by Tiresius and Jocasta to cease in his attempts to discover the relationship between the contaminator of Thebes and his own origins. Juana pleads with Kino to give up the pearl. Yet they all risk the danger, suffer the tragic consequences, and gain self-knowledge.

In affirming his resolve to take the pearl to another city where he might get its fair price, knowing that he will again be subject to the attacks of thieves, Kino says, "I am a man." Juana recalls this after Kino had struck her down to keep her from throwing the pearl back into the ocean.

It meant certain things to Juana. It meant that he was half insane and half god. It meant that Kino would drive his strength against a mountain and plunge his strength into the sea. Juana, in her woman's soul, knew that the mountain would stand while the man broke himself; that the sea would surge while the man drowned in it. And yet it was this thing that made him a man, half insane, half god . . . (p. 77)

This passage recapitulates the thesis of the novel: that man, insanely courageous and divine in his vision of the possible, will be crushed by elemental forces in the universe, but that he will be fulfilling and becoming more aware of the essence of his manhood in the process.

Although I think many teachers who use elements of pragmatic criticism might regard the above as a plausible interpretation of The Pearl, they should remember that "everyone takes his own meaning from it and reads his own life into it," lest they attempt to force a single interpretation upon the class. The varying interpretations and reactions should be a source of fruitful discussion that will broaden students' understanding of the novel and open them to a diversity of personal responses.

Consider these varying personal reactions to The Pearl: 1) Many people come away from a reading of The Pearl acknowledging the evil in the world, hating injustice and resolving to fight it. They see in the novel the symbolic truth of myths and fairy stories; to paraphrase Edna St. Vincent Millay, they know that life is like that, but they are not resigned.⁴ They believe that Kino returns to the village not with resignation, but with rage, and perhaps with resolve to begin all over again, a dangerous, powerful man. 2) Others agree that the story is "true," but think that there is no sense in fighting injustice because such a fight will only destroy what one loves most. They see Kino's act of throwing away the pearl as an admission that he was wrong in the first place to try to better his life. 3) Still others, like the writer of Time's review, see The Pearl as a "counterfeit jewel" full of "calculated ambiguity" and "manipulated sentimentality."

The pragmatic teacher should encourage the class to explore the sources and reasons for their reactions. And he should continually encourage the class to refocus on the world Steinbeck creates in this novel.

I suggest also that he raise the following questions, if the students themselves do not raise them, to continue the pragmatic inquiry: Why does Kino throw away the pearl? What does this act mean in the context of the work? What part does the description of the environment--the gulf, the haze, the animals--play in contributing to the overall effect of the work? What effects do the songs Kino hears have? How does the method of narration, the point of view, affect the work? What differences might another method have had? What are the implications of Kino's decision to return to the village rather than continue to the north to sell the pearl? At the end of the novel, what is Kino's disposition toward the pearl, the gods, God, his fellow man? What set of values does he eventually arrive at? (These two questions are raised by Harry Morris in "Pearl as Allegory.") How good is The Pearl? In terms of its effect on readers? As a novel? As a parable or allegory? What criteria for "goodness" underlie a given evaluation?

I have not dealt in this article with the problem of when or how these questions should be raised, whether the book should be read in class and analyzed during the reading, or whether these questions should be study questions. These are decisions the teacher must make.

In addition, I would like to suggest that some interesting and informative discussions might come from using some of the following role-playing activities designed to help students experience more directly the problems faced by Kino and Juana:

The class acts out other ways Kino might have behaved after 1) the doctor refuses to treat Coyotito, 2) the pearl buyers refuses to give him a fair price, 3) he throws away the pearl.

The class acts out other ways Juana may have behaved in responding 1) to the doctor's attempt to treat her son, 2) to Kino after he had struck her.

The teacher should ask students why their solutions are different. Their answers may lead to an examination of the freedoms and constraints of their

own cultures and values, and to an inquiry into the use of violence as a recourse against injustice, and into other means of dealing with injustice.

In this article I have discussed some ways to use pragmatic critical strategies in teaching The Pearl. It should not, however, be read or taught exclusively from a pragmatic perspective. The animal imagery Steinbeck uses throughout the novel invites the critical perspective Abrams would call "objective," other critics would call formalistic or "new."

NOTES

¹James A. Squire and Roger K. Applebee, Teaching English in the United Kingdom (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1969).

²See the publisher's comments on the back page of the 1968 Bantam, the review of Time (December 22, 1947, pp. 90, 92), Peter Lisca's "Steinbeck's Fable of the Pearl" in Steinbeck and His Critics, Margaret Ryan's sections on The Pearl in Teaching the Novel in Paperback, and four articles in The English Journal: "The Pearl: Realism and Allegory" (October, 1963), by Harry Morris; "Thematic Structure in The Pearl" (January, 1965), by Ernest E. Karsten, Jr.; "Proportioning in Fiction: The Pearl and Silas Marner (April, 1967), by Roland Bartel; and "The Contemporary American Novella: An Existential Approach" (January, 1970), by Gary Steinley.

³John Steinbeck, The Pearl (New York: Bantam Books, Inc., 1958). Subsequent citations from The Pearl will be indicated by page numbers in parentheses immediately following quotation.

⁴C.M. Woodhouse, "Introduction," in George Orwell, Animal Farm, A Signet Classic (New York: The New American Library, Inc., 1954), p. xii.

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Exploring Line and Circle Imagery: An Entrance
Into Moby-Dick

by
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While Moby-Dick is a widely accepted classic of nineteenth century American literature, it is long and complicated enough to frighten even the bravest high school and undergraduate student. How does one begin to explore so oceanic a novel? How does one avoid both reducing its patterns and drowning in its mobility? One way to ease students into the novel's complexity is by examining its imagery.

The chapter entitled "The Grand Armada" is a natural way to begin studying Melville's use of the line and circle.¹ In this kaleidoscopic section of the novel, Melville begins, not by introducing his readers to schools of whales, but by describing the Pequod's location in space. Melville's readers, as well as the Pequod, are about to enter the Pacific Ocean, the most central ocean of the world. By the mystical tone of the chapter, we are influenced to feel as if we are entering a central gateway opening into a vast walled empire, a world richer and purer than our own. We pass between the islands of Sumatra and Java without western-like ceremony. The Pequod, insulated and self sufficient, carrying no cargo but herself, her crew, their weapons and wants, meets no pirates and touches no land. We parallel the Pequod's insulation as does Ahab. Ishmael compares him to the sun who for a long time "has raced with his fiery ring, and needs no sustenance but what's in himself".² The circumnavigating Pequod, as well as her captain, is equal to the suprarich world where west silently meets east. It is as the Pequod closes more and more upon Java Head, floating between green palmy cliffs, breathing cinnamon air, searching for the whales frequently found in this central location, that a cheering cry from the masthead adds its contrapuntal ring to this magnificent scene and the Pequod's crew sees in the distance a caravan of thousands, an extensive herd of Sperm Whales.

Ishmael, the perceptual artist, offers us a still-point. The kaleidoscope is momentarily stopped and Ishmael draws us a physical description of the scene:

Broad on both bows, at the distance of some two or three miles, and forming a great semicircle, embracing one half of the level horizon, a continuous chain of whale-jets were up-playing and sparkling in the noon-day air. Unlike the straight perpendicular twin-jets of the Right Whale, which, dividing at top, fall over in two branches, like the cleft drooping boughs of a willow, the single forward-slanting spout of the Sperm Whale presents a thick curled bush of mist, continually rising and falling away to leeward. (p. 490)

Unsatisfied with this technical vision, Ishmael attempts to share the magic of haze and light:

Seen from the Pequod's deck, then, as she would rise on a high hill of the sea, this host of vapory spouts, individually curling up into the air, and beheld through a blending atmosphere of bluish haze, showed like the thousand cheerful chimneys of some dense metropolis, descried of a balmy autumnal morning, by some horseman on a height. (p. 490)

The kaleidoscopic scene changes. The fleet hurries forward through the straits, as if to escape the Pequod. They gradually contract the wings of their semi-circle and swim in one solid, but still crescentic center. The caravan is before them, and Ishmael thinks of capturing some of their number. Other members of the Pequod respond similarly as the sails are raised and the harpooners begin handling their weapons. Harpoon is held against whale: linear object against curve.

In the midst of these round, rolling objects, Ishmael is searching for Moby Dick. Ishmael has seen but half the canvas. Our focus changes as Tash-tego's voice directs attention to the rear. Corresponding to the crescent before them is one behind. This crescent is a distorted mirror image of the first: the spouts appear fragmented and the smooth curve is replaced by a shattered line. This broken image does not represent the spouts of whales, but Asiatic pirates pursuing the Pequod.⁸ Ishmael, Ahab, and the reader note the irony of the scene: while the Pequod appears to be chasing whales, it is being chased by ungodlike forces toward its destiny.

Other lines are brought into the foreground of the kaleidoscope. When Ahab realizes he is being chased toward the whales, the complexity of his thoughts rib his brow "like the black sand beach after some stormy tide had been gnawing it." As the Pequod nears the whales, lowering its boats, more lines appear: the whale spouts look like flashing lines of stacked bayonets. Again the kaleidoscope turns and the whales seem mad in their consternation. They expand in vast irregular circles, aimlessly swimming, betraying their distraction by their short thick spoutings.

From violence, irregular circles, and short broken lines, we move to Ishmael's vision of stasis. He observes that although many of the whales are moving violently that the herd neither advances nor retreats. When Queequeg flings his harpoon, strikes a whale, and steers for the innermost heart of the herd, Ishmael chooses to look outward and watch the tumults of the outer concentric circles. Himself in a womblike environment, hemmed in by a living wall, Ishmael notes how calves force the crew to at least momentarily respond to them on their own terms:

Like household dogs they came snuffling around us, right up to our gunwales, and touching them; till it almost seemed that some spell had suddenly domesticated them. Queequeg patted their foreheads; Starbuck scratched their backs with his lance; but fearful of the consequences, for the time refrained from darting it. (p. 497)

In the center of this enchanted calm, the reader remains suspended while mothers nurse their calves. Ishmael has again turned the kaleidoscope. He focuses on the infants' world: "...the young of these whales seem looking up towards us, but not at us, as if we were but a bit of Gulf-weed in their new-born sight" (p. 497). But the scene does not remain peaceful. The mother of an infant who is still attached to her by the umbilical cord is stricken. Queequeg cries out in empathy and Starbuck watches as the rope and cord entangle, entrapping the infant. Line coldly cuts through circle shattering curve. This horrifying scene foreshadows another, more inclusive horror: a struck whale who has run away with a loose cutting-spade in him recalls the whole herd from its stationary flight. Tormented to madness, it swims through the water, wounding and murdering its own comrades as it churns in a broken, irregular fashion.

As the entire host of whales tumble upon the inner center, Starbuck and Queequeg attempt to steer the boat out of the crescentic mountain. The crew escapes losing only Queequeg's hat, and the fleet again becomes peaceful. There is no further pursuit. Only one drugged whale is captured; the scene disperses.

In "The Grand Armada," Melville is attempting to show the reader the myriad sides and implications of a world where each gestalt gives way to another, different, not always directly connected, vision. Melville concentrates on a motion, only to allow its dispersion. Each foreground submerges back into the spectrum of experience; some scenes linger longer, others passively melt away. Melville's end product becomes a montage of his fragmented visions; he has used both concrete detail and psychological suggestion to reconstruct as honest a world as possible.

Melville's genius lies in his ability to fuse inner and outer realities. His images of the circle and line reach down past the material, delicately touching the elemental. F.O. Matthiessen praises Melville's reliance on the physical world--a world he carefully uses to prevent his drama from gliding off into a space where the reader can feel no normal ties.³ As Matthew Arnold states, every great composer makes his own vehicle,⁴ and for Melville this vehicle is the whaling industry. Within this industry there are sufficient images of roundness and linearity so that he can find natural objects through which to study order and progression.

One of the central tools of this industry is rope. It infiltrates almost every area of whaling and every section of Moby-Dick. Rope is part of the boat and part of the chase; it attaches sails and is tied to harpoons. Rope gives the sailor his place, his security, and at times his death. It connects to the round images of whale and ship, and it curves, itself becoming a round object that Melville can explore through the consciousness of Ishmael and other members of the Pequod's crew.

Melville exaggerates the rope's nature in order to increase dramatic effect. For instance, most whale ships have rope running down their centers, but Melville, in designing the Pequod, creates a line that runs all around the ship. He chooses to examine the full complexity of rope, uniting qualities of good and evil, treachery and control. Melville also uses the strengthening

power of opposition by connecting all four elements to rope: fire is represented by the presence of smoke; water is represented by the element through which the line moves during the whale hunt; and earth is the physical rope itself, always present on the whale ship and always potentially volatile.

Just as Ishmael is fascinated by the center of things and their circular reverberations, he is also fascinated by the center's radii. The line is a method of moving outward, a method of making contact. But just as the circle can destroy, so can the line: it is the umbilical cord that can bring life, yet attached to a mother who has been struck by a harpoon, it can kill the child it has just been nourishing. Ishmael is aware that if the whale line has even the slightest kink, it, while moving, will easily remove an arm or leg (p. 376). The fact that layers of concentric spiralizations may look like cheese simply adds to his fear of the rope. Ishmael actually refers to the rope as magical. He describes what happens when even a single harpoon is darted: "The harpoon was hurled. 'Stern all!' The oarsman backed water; the same moment something went hot and hissing along every one of their wrists. It was the magical line" (p. 376). When even a single harpoon is darted the motion initiates the flow of rope all around the boat. Both the speed and power of the rope deny the probability of easy control. If the reader is not yet frightened enough of the rope, Ishmael offers him or her an intricate description of what holding the rope is like: "It was like holding an enemy's sharp two edged sword by the blade, and that enemy all the time striving to wrest it out of your clutch" (p. 376).

Melville purposefully creates a relationship between the physical world of rope and the mystical world. Even the elusive albatross can be caught by rope (p. 256f); as horrifying an animal as the all-grasping squid is nothing more than the living embodiment of it. Melville also has the sooty flames from the diabolical try-works light up the rigging. An unearthly message appears on it foreshadowing destruction (p. 639). Melville is alluding to the writing on the wall of Belshazzar's palace which foreshadowed the destruction of the Babylonian kingdom and he is also intricately weaving rope and mysticism as in other sections of Moby-Dick he intricately weaves circularity and mysticism.

Melville, in his exploration of the line and circle becomes confused over which to choose. This confusion is best depicted in his inconsistent choice of a steering mechanism for the Pequod: it is described both as a stick and a wheel. Early in the novel Ishmael explains to the reader that the steering mechanism of the Pequod is a curiously carved tiller made from the lower jaw of a whale. During a critical moment the helmsman who steers by that lever feels like a Tartar when holding back his fiery steed by clutching its jaw (p. 106). Yet in the midst of a larger crisis, when Ahab is in a fury, when an even more critical storm is up, and Ahab pushes the helmsman aside and attempts to steer the boat himself, he dashes the helm down before the helmsman can handle the spokes (p. 374), thus implying that the steering apparatus is a wheel. This disparity between tiller and wheel, between line and circle, seems to be more than a simple technical problem: it is a problem of vision.

As the chase leads the sailors closer to their destiny, balance and order are more and more frequently destroyed. Neither circle nor line proves

safe. Counter-balancing attempts are made, such as attaching rope to more powerful substances like iron and pole rather than wood and sail, and ropes are braided for increased strength, but the boats continually capsize and the ropes break.

The sailors become victims of their own inability to differentiate. Simultaneously, their need for some semblance of connection becomes stronger. Under the psychological strain of the second day's chase, Ishmael needs order desperately, and therefore perceives that the world is ordered. He sees all things running into the hull:

...as the one ship that held them all; though it was put together of all contrasting things--oak, and maple...iron, and pitch, and hemp-- yet all these ran into each other in the one concrete hull. (pp. 700-1)

In this scene, rope gains the foreground, dangerously becoming part of the unified vision. By being ignored, it gains power. The sailors are entering a metaphysical sphere and Ahab is increasing his own power by allowing them to become his objects:

Unmindful of the tedious rope-ladders of the shrouds, the men, like shooting stars, slid to the deck, by the isolated backstays and halyards; while Ahab, less dartingly, but still rapidly was dropped from his perch. (p. 702)

As in a dream, all things begin to move effortlessly. Unification evokes its opposite. The kaleidoscope turns and elements begin to terribly, irrevocably, break apart.

Ahab, unsuccessfully, tried to control the tragedy. He plays out more line and then rapidly hauls and jerks it in again. The ropes, however, rather than alleviating the problem, become intricately knotted. The whale has, by its untraceable evolutions, crossed and recrossed the three lines attached to him. The boats have become their own enemies, weaving in such a way as to make the rope even more convoluted. Line and circle join once again.

No action is direct: Ahab's desperate attempt to control his fate brings the reader back to Bulkington, the sailor who was the first to drown, the sailor who stepped on land only to return immediately to another watery voyage. Ishmael, carried away by his own need for order, has reinforced Bulkington's obsessive circling, his direct return to water: "Terrors of the terrible; is all this agony so vain? Take heart, take heart, O Bulkington! Bear thee grimly, demigod! Up from the spray of thy ocean-perishing--straight up, leaps thy apotheosis! (p. 148). Bulkington had drowned by going too directly back to water, and Ahab, too, in his monomaniacal need to revenge himself on Moby Dick, is courting death. Ahab is so directly identified with the line, with direct action, that when a rope snaps during the second to the last day of the chase, he cries out in pain, "'What breaks in me?'" As he has himself stated earlier, before he broke the sailors would hear him crack. The cracking rope represents his own cracking. The kaleidoscope turns and arrogance becomes pain.

Subject and object merge and Ahab becomes the rope the sailors have unsuccessfully controlled. The rope turns on itself and becomes the noose that hangs Ahab. The ship's shroud is Ahab's death cloth and rope, which can save, has chosen to kill.

Continual circular motion may create a suction to drown all things, as does the Pequod's spinning at the end of Moby-Dick. The chase itself has been little more than a mad circle (p. 251), as was the movement in the "Town Ho's Story," the endless motion of two men, Radney and Steerkilt, around a windlass (pp. 329-30). Motion waits for its end, and the end is often entropy.

Once again the kaleidoscope turns. The same circle that drowns, that carries the smallest chip of the Pequod out of sight (p. 722), saves one man, Ishmael, and one piece of wood, the life-buoy coffin. Ishmael connects himself to this coffin and a passing ship, the Rachel, rescues him. Line and circle again are intricately connected, and again, momentarily, the kaleidoscope rests at yet another still-point.

Moby-Dick is a startling dance, a moveable everchanging work of art. Radii proceed from the center, and yet when taken collectively form a circumference. The Grand Armada's movement demonstrates this in physical terms. Each point, each whale, has its double generating quality: it can circle and it can cut. Through Moby-Dick, Melville apprehends time and space. The voyage progresses and turns on itself: Ishmael begins and ends his journey alone. For Melville, the world is an infinite circle whose center is everywhere and whose extensions lie beyond human ken. Melville studies his vision through the actions of both character and object. He explores his own consciousness and the variety of his own needs, and yet creates a world that the reader can enter and explore.

Melville moves from order to anarchy and back to order again. The reader experiences a scattered totality as rich as life itself, a totality which can be broken and reformed but which cannot be successfully defined. Circles beget circles, lines beget lines, and the reader is left to ponder, to experience, to analyze, to reject Melville's definitions, and to begin again.

The archetypal symbols of line and circle adapt easily to the scopated rhythm of Melville's vision. He is fascinated by them because they have both the qualities of mystical transcendence and cold, unrelenting, earthly destruction. He is also enthralled by their fluidity: the line endlessly turning on itself, narrowing to a still point, widening to infinity. These images seem to have the power of their own volition and allow Melville to explore his world as a shattered totality, existing in incomprehensible, vaguely connected pieces, inviting the characters' and the readers' dreams and fears. By examining these images with students, we can help them gain tools through which to understand the complexity of Moby-Dick.

NOTES

¹Marilyn Judith Atlas, "A Psychobiographical Approach to Moby-Dick," Diss. Michigan State University, 1979. Please refer to this source for a more complete discussion of line and circle imagery in Moby-Dick and an exploration of how these images relate to the characters of the novel as well as to Herman Melville's personal relationships and search for order.

²Herman Melville, Moby-Dick, ed. Charles Fiedelson, Jr. (New York: The Bobbs-Merrill Co., 1964), p. 489. All subsequent references to this edition will be internally documented in the text of this essay.

³F.O. Matthiessen, American Renaissance (New York: Oxford University Press, 1968), p. 417.

⁴Matthew Arnold, Essays in Criticism, referred to in American Renaissance, p. 409.

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A Curious Triangle and the Double-Entry Notebook; or,
How A Theory of Language Can Help Us Teach Critical Reading and Writing

by
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Criticism is a tricky word, as tricky as any we depend on when we talk about how to teach reading and writing. I suggest that we think of criticism as the point where theory and practice meet: Criticism is knowing what you're doing and thereby how to do it. Criticism is method; it is practicing what you preach. One reason that the teaching of English is stymied is that the sense of method as theory brought to bear on practice has been lost. Theory is considered as either irrelevant, because it's abstract, or important, for precisely the same reason. The result is that instead of guidance for our pedagogy, we have, on the other hand, recipe-swapping ("I tried this last week and it worked--never mind why.") and, on the other, abstruse collocations of "data" concerning such ill-defined concepts as "syntactical maturity." If teachers have no interest in theory, it becomes the province of social scientists, psycholinguists, behavioral and cognitive psychologists or anybody else who can be funded to do "research." Criticism in the classroom could make researchers of all teachers: research in our field ought to mean studying the relationship of what and the how.

By assuring a place for criticism in the classroom, we are reclaiming method. Becoming critical, developing a method, is the best way, I think, for teachers and students to learn from one another. If we are all continually discovering, recognizing what it is we are doing, we'll have many more ways of finding out how to do it. In other words, criticism in the classroom could help us get rid of rigid lesson plans so that we would be able to take advantage of what John Donne called "emergent occasions." We could get rid of study questions, refusing to order textbooks which include them; refusing the Instructor's Manual that has the answers, asking for a refund of the money added onto the cost of the textbook so that the manual could be "provided free of charge." Out would go pre-fabricated units and tests and assignments. A ritual bonfire of those pink and yellow markers used to make pastel islands out of Important Passages would close this introductory phase of criticism in the classroom. We would then be free to undertake what I.A. Richards considered central to all learning, "the continuing audit of meaning."¹

It is often argued that we should encourage spontaneous response to literature rather than intervening with theory and abstract questions. I want to suggest in the following comment that our pedagogical choices are not limited to fostering unthinking "gut" reactions or encouraging anxious answers from our students about why they "feel" as they do or tirelessly asking "What is the author trying to say?" The essential significance of criticism in the classroom is that it enables us to teach reading for meaning and writing as a way of making meaning.

Criticism requires a theory of language which can account for meaning, which does not set it aside as a "mentalistic" matter or treat it as "the semantic component," a sparkplug that you insert in the language machine. How we think of language will, of course, determine how we think of literature. If we think of language as a set of slots to be filled, literature will be simply a fancy set of such slots, and we will teach, alternately, the slots and the slotted, "form" and "content." If our idea of language is that it is simply a "communication medium," then our energies in the literature class will go to finding "the message" that's being sent over the wires. If language is a veil which obtrudes between us and reality, there will be no way to suggest revisions or reconsiderations of one or another attempt to pierce it, boring or wild as the foray might be.

If we are to teach our students to read for meaning--to construe and interpret and appreciate literary texts--the meaning of meaning most useful to us is that it is a means: Speaking and writing, listening and reading all engage us in the making of meaning by means of language. If we can learn to think of language not as a tool, a single-purpose facilitator, but as an instrument which lets us see in many different ways--as both microscope and telescope, X-Ray and radar--then we can better discover how to make room at the center of all our courses for interpretation, for the study of meaning.

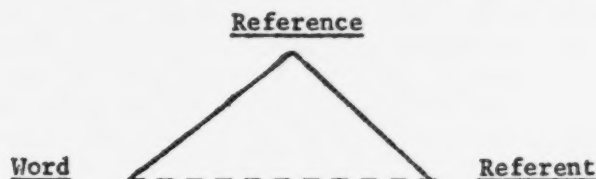
When we read critically, we are reading for meaning--and that is not the same thing as reading for "message." Meanings are not things and finding them is not like going on an Easter egg hunt. Meanings are relationships: they are unstable, shifting, dynamic; they do not stay still nor can we prove the authenticity or the validity of one or another meaning which we find. But that does not imply a necessary solipsism; it doesn't mean that the only thing we can say is "To me it means X--and that's that!" Rather, when teachers and students, in constructing and construing, cultivate the attitude which the philosopher C.S. Peirce called a "contrite fallibilism," the need for making a careful case to support our interpretations becomes evident. Isn't that what we want to teach? If students see that we can't prove that we're absolutely correct, interpretations not being susceptible to that kind of demonstration, then the task of making the best possible case gains an authenticity which it might have lacked. If we aren't gods who have perfect knowledge, we are nonetheless powerful creatures who can describe and define; tell stories and argue, encouraging, persuading, entertaining: Rhetoric is what we have instead of Omniscience.

Before turning to the practical aspects of method, let me suggest how we might keep in mind the nature of meaning as a means, a way to remember that meaning is dynamic and dialectical, that it depends on context and perspective, the setting in which it is seen and the angle from which it is seen. The model I'm thinking of is a triangle, but of a radically different sort from the familiar "triangle of discourse," which looks like this:



Sometimes, Speaker/Reality/Audience are at the three points, with Language or Text occupying the field enclosed. In this model there is no way of telling the relationship of Message to either its sources or to the speaker or the form in which it is expressed. As we know, "messages" are continually sent in the real world without being understood, but there is nothing in this model to explain why, or what we, as teachers of reading and writing, might do about failures of "communication."

The triangle I'm suggesting as a model helps on that score; it looks like this:



This diagram represents the "sign," or what I've been calling the "meaning relationship." What the word stands for--the referent--is known in terms of the reference. The dotted line stands for the fact that there is no immediate, direct relationship between words and things (including other words); we interpret the word of symbol by means of the idea which it represents to us. It takes an idea to find an idea. We know reality in terms of our ideas of reality. This curious triangle with the dotted line can help us remember that what we know, we know by means of mediating form. The triangle represents mediation, the interdependence of interpreter (what he already knows), the symbol (image or word), and the import or significance it has. Ironically, by not being quite a triangle, this triangle represents the triadicity of meaning relationships. It can help us keep in mind that we must include the beholder, the interpreter, in our account of texts; that texts require contexts and that contexts depend on perspective.²

If criticism is supported by such a theory of language as mediating form, what are the pedagogical implications? How can the curious triangle help us teach reading and writing? First of all, it can clarify how being conscious of what we are doing is the way to find out how to do it. Critical awareness is consciousness of consciousness (a name for the active mind). Minding the mind, being conscious of consciousness, is not the same sort of thing as thinking about your elbows when you're about to pitch a baseball; nor is it self-consciousness. Consciousness in meaning-making activity always involves us in interpreting our interpretations; thinking is a matter of "arranging our techniques of arranging"; criticism is a matter of coming to "know our knowledge." These circular formulations (they can make you dizzy at first) are, like the triangle with the dotted line, emblems of the fact that we can't get under the net of language. The point is that we can learn to take advantage of that fact, making the raising of consciousness about the making of meaning our chief strategy in teaching the circularity of all knowledge and in developing a "pedagogy of knowing."³

And, secondly, the curious triangle can help us focus on ways to bring students to see texts as the intermediary form of a process of making meaning which began in mysterious and unknowable ways, unfolding in sometimes predictable ways and sometimes in surprising ways, and which continues as texts

are construed and reconstructed. (The faddish term for this process is deconstruction, but that word suggests to me demolition, the breaking down of analysis without the synthesis which constitutes the other aspect of critical response.) Students can learn to see texts as mediating forms by studying evidence of the process by which they came into being. Reading in the notebooks of poets and novelists, seeing the rough drafts of a single poem, tracing the growth and development of a story from a scribbled note, a single image, a pair of terms; watching the meanings shift and change in the course of revising. All such study of literary work in progress will help make the point of "technique as discovery," in a well-known phrase.⁴ It's a good idea too, I think, to cultivate the habit of watching and listening to rehearsals and practice sessions of musicians and dancers, of watching artists at work. There is as much to be learned in the studio and the practice room about the composing process, the making of meaning, as there is in the library.

The most useful way to raise consciousness of texts as intermediary forms and to develop a method of critical reading is, simply put, to have students write continuously in a double entry notebook which I will shortly describe. Writing in the literature class is usually limited to taking notes on lectures and composing critical appreciations, critical essays or book reports. But writing can help develop a critical method of reading by, first of all, providing for students an example of a text coming into being--their own. And, secondly, by encouraging habits of reflective questioning in the process of reading, chiefly by means of interpretive paraphrase, writing can help students replace the non-question "What is the author trying to say?" with the critical question "How does it change the meaning when I change the text and put it this way?" The double-entry notebook, by offering the chance to practice interpreting in such a way that whatever is learned about reading is something learned about writing, can teach that how we construe is how we construct. Languaging, as some like to say, is our means of making meaning.

I ask my students (all of them: freshmen, upperclassmen, teachers in graduate seminars) to furnish themselves with a notebook, spiral-bound at the side, small enough to be easily carried around but not so small that writing is cramped. (School teachers who have tried this idea tell me, however, that their students insist on a notebook that will fit into the back pocket of their jeans.) What makes this notebook different from most, perhaps, is the notion of the double entry: on the right side reading notes, direct quotations, observational notes, fragments, lists, images--verbal and visual; on the other (facing) side, notes about those notes, summaries, formulations, aphorisms, editorial suggestions, revisions, comment on comment. The reason for the double entry format is that it provides a way for the student to conduct that "continuing audit of meaning" which is at the heart of learning to read and write critically. The facing pages are in dialogue with one another.

The double-entry notebook is for all kinds of writing, creative or critical; any assignment you can think up can be adapted so that it can teach dialectic, another name for the continuing audit.⁵ Suppose you want your students in the seventh grade (or the eleventh: in between, self-consciousness tends to overpower conscientization) to read some nature poems. The writing assigned could be a record of ten minutes of observation and meditation carried out daily over a week--descriptions and speculations in response to a sea

shell or a milkweed pod or a chestnut burr or any natural object (the odder the better) which can serve as "text": Reading the Book of Nature is probably the oldest writing assignment in the world. Each day should begin with re-reading the notes from the day before and writing a recapitulation on the facing page. At the week's end, an assignment of two paragraphs: 1) a description of the object, based on the right hand side entries; 2) a comment on the process of observing and interpreting, based on the left hand side, but in either case, the writer being free to move back and forth from notes to recapitulation.

But assignments need not be so highly structured: Any writing assignments which will encourage students to look and look again will be teaching critical reading and critical thinking. Perception is one of the best models for the process of making meaning. A few strategies like transformation or a simple heuristic such as "What is it the opposite of?" can be quickly learned and put to use by all students, no matter what their level of proficiency. Designing a poster to advertise a play, for instance, could be a process of constructing which would use the right hand page for notes on lettering, visual design, suggestions of scenes to be depicted, etc. The left hand page could be a rough sketch or instructions to the artist. This is not an "affective" pleasure but an exercise in translating, the most basic form in interpretation. Writing mini-versions of novels and plays exercises the powers of generalizing, summary and definition.⁶ Expanding or expatiating or parodying is an excellent way to practice out implications. Thus, working towards narrative from photographs in Edward Steichen's Family of Man can teach as much about the strategies of characterization as students would get in fifty pages of Study Questions about how Hardy makes his characters plausible.

The essential point of the double-entry notebook is that meaning is being made from the first: the reason that we find it so hard to move from personal writing to expository writing in our teaching is that we do not always define what they have in common. The chief pedagogical use of the curious triangle with the dotted line is to remind us that students, in whatever they write and with whatever they read, are interpreting and composing: they are making meaning.

NOTES

¹Richards, one of the founders of modern literary criticism, is the only critic to have devoted his time principally to elucidating the ways in which theory and practice can be mutually beneficial. English teachers at all levels have more to learn from him than from anyone else, I believe. Speculative Instruments (N.Y.: Harcourt, 1955) and How to Read a Page (N.Y.: Norton, 1942; rpt. 1965) are good places to begin.

²The "triadic" triangle comes from The Meaning of Meaning, C.K. Ogden and I.A. Richards (N.Y.: Harcourt, 1946). For an interesting discussion of the two triangles and "triadicity," see Walker Percy, The Message in the Bottle (N.Y.: Farrar, Straus, Giroux, 1975). I have tried to suggest some of the pedagogical implications of triadicity in "Towards a Pedagogy of Knowing," Freshman English News (Spring, 1978).

³"Pedagogy of knowing" and "conscientization" are terms of critical importance (they are both theoretical and practical) in the thinking of Paulo Freire, from whose work in literacy training we all can learn. Education for Critical Consciousness (N.Y.: Seabury Press, 1973) is a good introduction.

⁴The essay with this title by Mark Schorer is an important document in modern criticism. It appeared in the first issue of the Hudson Review (1948) and has been widely reprinted.

⁵Dialogue and dialectic are cognate: I call it a "dialectical notebook" in my textbook, Forming/Thinking/Writing: The Composing Imagination (Hayden, 1978), where it is described in some detail.

⁶Morris Sagoff's ShrinkLits (N.Y.: Workman, 1980) offers some amusing examples.

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Exercises in the Criticism of Narrative for the
First Few Days in an Introductory Literature Course

by
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It is a truth universally acknowledged that an instructor in possession of the first few days of a new term is often in want of material to fill that time when sizing up instructors, dropping or adding courses, buying books, and reading their first assignments. For my Introduction to Fiction courses I have developed a set of exercises to supply that want and to keep Cotton Mather from mounting the pulpit in my head and laying on about wasting time and doing the devil's work, exercises that enable me at once to address complex critical issues and to expose to daylight many of the unexamined assumptions that students bring to the reading of literary texts.

The first item is presented as a typed version of handwritten notes that--so the fiction goes--I have found in a parking lot. The students are asked to construct or reconstruct the situation that informs these discrete particulars with specific meaning; in short, they are asked to discover the single episode that makes intelligible sense of all the notes. The notes appear in the following arbitrary order:

Meet Jane at 9:00 p.m.
See lawyer on Tues.
Alice's plane leaves at 10:00 p.m. Thurs.; returns
next Tues. at 8:30 p.m.
Pick up tickets to concert Fri. morning
Susan sleeping at Paula's Fri. and Sat.
Mike's camping trip Fri., Sat., and Sun.
Send flowers with note to Jane on Fri.
Get key to cabin from Peter on Thurs.
Pick up chains from gas station
Pick up parcel from drugstore Fri. morning
Supper for Susan Sun. evening

After we explore a few of the manifold situational and relational possibilities (Is Jane the wife? Is Alice? Are Paula and Mike the children of the note-taker? etc.), someone--usually rather quickly, comes up with a tawdry, soap-operaish fiction involving infidelity with Jane at a cabin in the mountains while Alice, Paula, and Mike are away, a fiction that, once stated, achieves virtually unanimous acceptance as the correct one.

There is, of course, no correct fiction underlying these diverse particulars. Time and space are too uncertain; relations are hopelessly unsettled; things (chains, parcel, tickets, etc.) are too willing to participate in too

many adventures, and so forth. What the "consensus" fiction does have, however, is explanatory power. It is not simply the case that this hypothesis appeals to a cheap (its acceptance is strongly, though not perhaps compellingly, prompted by its cheapness) and tiresomely familiar scheme of naughtiness, or that it is in any way "privileged"; rather, it immediately satisfies the primary standards against which, intuitively and deliberately, all hypotheses are tested for their soundness, i.e., scope and precision. The fiction or hypothesis has sufficient scope to account for the whole situation, and it has sufficient precision to find a place for each particular. And it has economy. Other explanations require either the generation of additional details (i.e., particulars not specified in the original notes) to account for the coherent organization of the "textual" givens or the postulation of a situation that is dull to the point of impertinence (why bother to reconstruct a scene that contains inherently no latent drama at all; better to deposit the notes in the nearest trash can).

With or without the prompting of the instructor, the natural tendency of any mind confronted with these notes would be, I think, to impose upon them a pattern of significance, since, as beings, we are slanted in the direction of coherence; otherwise, we would die in a welter of particulars or randomness (die, perhaps, as Pope suggests, of aromatic pain). Among other things, this little exercise gives students quick and easy access to the processes involved in hypothesis forming and testing (strong evidence must be adduced in support of any reading, and readings must be accountable to the particulars) and, not so incidentally, informs them not only that all reading involves hypotheses (particulars cannot be understood at all except in reference to informing conceptions; independently of Kant, they learn that there are no percepts without concepts), but that even to aspire to adequacy a reading (an interpretation, a sense of the whole) must imply and be implied by the specific details of the text. At the very least, I hope to make clear to students that reading literature is a rigorous undertaking and that our task is what Virginia Woolf said it was: to "free ourselves from the cramp and confinement of our own personalities" and to show that, for good and sufficient reasons, "our impressions hold good for others" as well.

The other two pieces of business in my opening routine involve a form of a game sometimes called "gossip." I select several students (usually five) from the class to participate in the retelling of two short narratives that I have written. Once we are in the hall, I read a narrative to the first student out of the hearing of the others; the narrative is then related to the other students seriatim; once the story has been passed on, each student returns to the class and relates what he has heard. (Read on, what you suppose will happen does not happen perhaps in precisely the way you suppose.) The two narratives are:

1. After listening to Johnny Sunshine and the Pipe Joint Company, three men, two wearing gray business suits and one wearing a saffron robe, walk to the corner of Lane and High, where they sit down and then proceed to chant and meditate. With eyes closed and voices droning, they appear to slip into a trance. Slowly, one of the men gets up and, after removing a shiny, metal object that

he had concealed in his clothes, goes directly into the small, frame house behind him. Shortly thereafter, several screams are heard, and five minutes later, the man emerges from the house carrying a large, black box and wearing a bright, green hat.

2. After several months of marriage, a husband had come to suspect his wife's fidelity for a variety of reasons; particularly, he had noticed that, when greeting him at night in their two-bedroom, two bath apartment, after he had spent a hard day working in the decentering room of the Derrida, de Man, and Hartman semiotic factory, his wife's ardor had diminished in recent weeks. He reluctantly entertained the idea that she had a paramour, plaguing his mind with lascivious visions. Determined to ascertain the truth once and for all, he left the apartment one Tuesday morning, as usual, carrying, as usual, his Samsonite attache case, and, after circling the block containing several modest, respectable, brownstone buildings very much like his own, he went immediately to Paul's Bar and Grill, which was situated directly opposite to his building. From the front booth he commanded an unobstructed view of the entrance to his building. Around eleven o'clock, he watched a young man, dressed in a manner totally out of keeping with the sartorial standards of the middle-class neighborhood, enter his building, after looking furtively up and down the quiet street. When the young man had not left the building after fifteen minutes, the husband, consumed with rage, jealousy, and despair, rushed across the street, up the stairs, and into the apartment, all the time screaming his wife's name hysterically. Running into the large bedroom, he found his wife naked, but alone, in bed. Convinced that the young man had made a hasty retreat as he was dashing up the stairs, the husband proceeded to ferret him out. He ran from room to room opening and slamming doors and looking under furniture. In desperation, he ran back to the bedroom, looked under the bed, and checked the master bedroom. Finally, he opened the wardrobe closet. There, half-dressed, stood the young man, looking rather sheepish. Furiously, the husband screamed: "What the hell are you doing here?" With a puzzled and somewhat philosophical expression on his face, the young man replied: "Everybody's gotta be someplace."

Because I have tried these "stories" out on several classes and have witnessed many students of varying abilities and powers of retention do unto them remarkably similar things, I think I can safely say that the transformations which the narratives undergo are attributable to, are caused by the nature of the material and that no matter how often the experiment is repeated the same kinds of results will appear. Much of the first narrative, as might be expected, is lost, and what is lost in one telling is lost irretrievably. Generally, each version becomes progressively shorter as the story is retold,

and from first to last we are treated to a series of events lacking meaning, relation, or significance. (Interestingly, events may be lost, but they are never rearranged; there is a rudimentary chronological appropriateness to the details.) What I had hoped--and originally assumed--would happen--namely, that the odd member of the group (the one wearing the saffron robe) would go into the house, that the shiny object would become a weapon, or that among the facts (the entering of the house, the screaming, the emergence from the building, and the carrying out of a large black box) some connections would be established--never happens. If the first teller has a weak short-term memory, the exercise could be terminated after the second telling, for by then the "story" has been reduced to so few details that it is in no danger of suffering further truncation. Fidelity to and preservation of the narrative depends entirely upon powers of concentration and recall. The tale is very short, but I have not yet met five students for whom it was too short.

Why the mind, that beast with a rage for order, does not create the dramatic connections it does not find can be explained, I think, by considering that the tale lacks, not order, but richness and significance; it is empty, but not "incomplete." The narrative has sequentiality, and it does not beg for consequentiality. If these events were presented to us in this fashion by a friend, we would feel compelled to ask for more information, to ask such questions as "Well, so what?" "What happened?" "Why did she scream?" etc. But unlike the notes in the previous example, these events do not seek more formal completion than they already have. What is lacking here is not so much a principle of form, a principle of integration but, rather, a sufficient stock of details begging to be teased into meaningful and coherent relationship. The mind exerts all its energy in recollection.

The second narrative, though it is more than three times the length of the first (about 350 words to 110), surprisingly enough, survives the five retellings intact. When I first presented this narrative, I had hoped that much of it would be preserved, but as I watched the eyes of the student to whom I read it glaze over and saw the panic within become increasingly visible with the recitation of each additional sentence, I found my confidence in the experiment diminishing. As I went on interminably, I could almost hear the brain cells crying out for relief, and during some parts of the reading, the student seemed to be attending only to his anxiety and not at all to the narrative. But, artistic structure and sound principles be praised, this student and all his successors have managed, in spite of their initial stark terror, to keep this tale (this trite, this lame joke) coherent and complete in all retellings. Even more surprising, to me at least, is the fact that an unusually large number of indifferent, irrelevant, or non-essential details (e.g., the Samsonite attache case, the number of baths in the apartment, the brownstone building, etc.) are maintained in the several rehearsals of the tale. Moreover, in the repetition of this narrative a detail once dropped is not necessarily lost forever, as was the case with the saffron robe narrative. Much of my language disappears, of course, but nothing essential to the narrative falls out; indeed, throughout the retellings, my language is often presented in paraphrase, and where my language exits, new language, analogous in meaning and value to mine, enters. Students find in the process of retelling suitable, adequate, and appropriate substitutes for my specific terminology.

When we discuss the differences between the two narratives and try to account for the drastic abridgment of one narrative and the essential preservation of the other, we (primarily the students) come up with immediate answers. I am always struck by the subtlety of their explanations; they almost always hit upon the obvious reasons for the differences and then go beyond them, coming up with sophisticated ideas which they all instantly grasp but for which they do not have a developed critical vocabulary. That vocabulary I attempt to provide, and I am sometimes able to expand on what is implicated in their remarks, displaying their thought in full ramification. (This is no unpleasant business.)

From this jealous husband narrative, we together discover much that is useful. The narrative is retained because it is a consecutive, consequential, and complete comic action, one that is governed by a distinct, identifiable end--the punch line--which is the subsumptive, controlling principle of the work as a whole. The writer, as well as the teller or reteller, has the punch line for security; it is in relation to that that all the antecedent parts must be ordered. Reasoning backward from the punch line, we are able to determine (or recall) that such and such a dilemma involving such and such characters in such and such a situation is necessary. To make the essential elements of the action necessary and probable, it is only required that we get all the principals in the right places at the right times. The action contains very few essential details (my narrative is only a highly elaborated--and unnecessarily gorgeous--version of one of Myron Cohen's old jokes), and they are suspicion, search, and resolution. Moreover, the tale has few factorial details (I borrow this term from Elder Olson and mean by it those details that are necessary to get the husband out of the house and into a place where he can observe his building, to get the young man into the house, and to get the husband involved in a search of the apartment); these, along with the essential details, are always retained, because the completion and formal effectiveness of the work depend upon them and because the form demands them. Writer and teller are governed by formal imperatives. Beyond the factorial and the essential we have an enormous number of what we can call (again following Olson) ornamental details, though in this narrative the non-essential particulars (Samsonite attache case, name of the factory, etc.) function less in the service of making the scene interesting, beautiful, or vivid than in the service of confusion and unnecessary complication. That so many of these details are retained in retelling testifies, if perhaps quietly, to the security that knowledge of the end or purpose provides; they insinuate their way into remembrance almost incidentally, in large part because one does not have to strain to hold onto the narrative line.

From these facts of the text we can move easily into a discussion of synonymy and what Hirsch calls "intrinsic genres," for what allows the substitution of analogous terms is an inexplicit sense of the whole that guides writing and recollection (we never recollect even relatively short passages word for word). We find terms that fall within the range of toleration constituted by our conception of the form. This constitutive conception is the intrinsic genre which becomes explicitly realized only when the work is completed (or retold). Furthermore, all along the line alternative words can replace those in my version so long as those words are of a type compatible with the originals and consonant with the form. Words are valuable and apt relative to their functions, and function determines the appropriateness of

words. Hence, to expand on previous points for a moment, it is clear that we have more dictional latitude with ornamental than with factorial and essential details, though even the latter allow for substitutions; deviation from original phrasing is possible at every point, but only so long as the substitution does not violate the ongoing integrity of the form or genre.

In class, I usually move next to the problems we encounter when we try to demonstrate the validity of any given interpretation, but for the purposes of this paper (and in deference to the overworked patience of the reader), I shall conclude by reviewing the three examples and commenting briefly on how I use them later in the term. In the first example, we have an instance of a consequential but non-consecutive action; in the second, an example of a consecutive but inconsequential action, and in the third a consecutive and consequential action. When all three examples are examined in the space of a couple of days, the students begin to learn how to participate effectively in the creation and testing of critical hypotheses; in addition, they are exposed to a wide range of critical problems. Throughout the term, we deal mainly, of course, with consecutive and consequential works (the joke is the only illustrative piece which, with the gracious allowance of the reader, can be considered as art), but we are repeatedly reminded--as we run bump into recalcitrant works, texts, that is, that cannot be assimilated by our working assumptions about form--that literary works are organized in marvellously diverse ways.

In this course I usually teach Rasselas and Pride and Prejudice, and sometime during the discussion of Austen's work I ask the students to recall as much as they can of the second and third tales discussed at the beginning of the term. The second comes back haltingly in disiecta membra, but the third returns complete and well accommodated. I then ask them to locate a scene in Rasselas (e.g., when exactly does Rasselas meet the philosopher of nature) and in Pride and Prejudice (e.g., Wickham's "history" of Darcy). The Austen episode is easily and quickly placed, whereas the one from Rasselas is not. We have encountered the grounds of these differences earlier. Although massively superior to the joke in quality and human significance, Pride and Prejudice is, like the joke, a consecutive and consequential action, dependent for its effectiveness upon the initiation, complication, and resolution of problems about which we are made to care because (at least in the novel) of the ethical quality of the agents and the seriousness of their involvement in the events. Rasselas, on the other hand, is like our first example of random notes, in that by and large the order of most of the events is not crucial to the purpose of the work, and like the saffron robe narrative, in that specific details are not readily recalled. Yet, in spite of these similarities, we also recognize that Rasselas is a complete and effective work of art. What we come to realize, of course, is that although Rasselas uses the devices of consequential action (e.g., characters, dialogue, a sequence of events, etc.), it is unified by something other than action, by problems relating to the kinds and degrees of happiness possible to human beings in this contingent and probationary state of life; what concerns us is not character and action, but thought. When we consider the work as an apologue (a work governed in all its particulars by a body of ideas pertaining to a specific area of human concern) and not as a novel of consequential action, we discover something worth knowing about the diversity of artistic forms and the imperatives that underlie their integrity.

Each of us manages to get through the first days of every new term by one means or another, and what I have offered above are merely a few devices that work for me in my efforts to integrate critical principles into introductory literature courses (the devices would work for upper-division courses as well, I think) and to establish a "level of discourse" for the rest of the term. The theoretical commitments that more than peep out at the reader of this essay are perhaps not for everyone, but I suspect that my examples, properly adapted, would be useful to instructors of any critical persuasion. What I do know with certainty is that, however sophisticated or clumsy my devices may be, they do accomplish one good thing: they get students into the habit of talking, of participating in class, and once that habit is established, it takes more deadly dull teaching than most of us are capable of to break.

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Can We Teach the Latest Literary Theories to College Freshmen?

by
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The answer to this question is not obvious. In the cases of Derrida and DeMan, we might answer "no"; but in the cases of Chatman and Culler, "yes." In the case of deconstruction, "no"; in the case of structuralism, "yes."¹ However we answer it, the question is answerable only if its scope is narrowed.

So, let's take a recent theoretical text, say Seymour Chatman's Story and Discourse,² a readable synthesis of the last decade of structuralist thought on narrative, and a frequently anthologized literary text, say James Joyce's "Araby," to reformulate the question in the context of teaching a freshman "Introduction to Literature" course. Let's ask ourselves: can we teach Chatman's conceptions of "story" or "discourse" or "point of view" to freshmen reading "Araby" for the first time in relative ignorance not only of Joyce, not only of Ireland at the turn of the century, but of literature in general and the short story in particular?

Asking myself this narrower question, I answer with a qualified "yes." We can teach Chatman's taxonomy to freshmen if we satisfy two conditions: first, that our teaching takes into account the level of literary competence present-day freshmen typically exhibit; and, second, that it takes into account the objectives of the curriculum which places the course in a specific relationship to other courses. Both of these conditions can be met if we present Chatman's concepts to students as specific instructions rather than as abstract ideas.

If we consider the first condition, we would have to admit that the level of literary competence in freshmen courses is minimal. Most freshmen have read few literary works. Surely, then, it is absurd to teach them Seymour Chatman when they have read only two or three stories in their lifetime. Surely, this is to put the cart before the horse. To introduce freshmen to recent critical theory would seem to be a serious mistake. I'd agree, if the theory is presented as a set of concepts; but, I'd disagree, if it is presented as a set of instructions on how to read or write about literature. For the student who has read only two or three stories, reading "Araby" is, if anything, an experience of frustration precisely because that student has so little competence in reading stories. Hence, to pile on story after story would be to pile on frustration after frustration. Some means of reducing the frustration, some helpful instructions would be of greater benefit to students who take our "Introduction to Literature" courses.

Considering the second condition, we would have to admit that, as a part of a university-wide curriculum, "Introduction to Literature" courses at the

freshman level usually have as their objective one or both of the following aims: to teach students how to read literature, and/or to teach students how to write about literature. Story and Discourse, however, is neither a work of literature nor a work about writing. It is also axiomatic that one learns to read literature by reading literature and to write by writing. Yet, though what we have said suggests that Story and Discourse should not be taught in freshmen "Introduction to Literature" courses, I am not prepared to grant that Chatman's theory should not be used in such courses. There is a difference between presenting a theory as a theory to a class and presenting instructions based on the theory to a class. I would argue that, though Story and Discourse cannot be taught in its published form--as a set of interrelated ideas about narratives, it can be translated into a set of instructions about how to read narratives. And, I would argue further that, when these instructions are made explicit in written arguments about literary works, they perform a crucial warranting function in the logic of critical discourse, even at the freshmen level.

If we are to address ourselves to the problem of building a literature program, it seems reasonable, where possible, to make use of recent advances in literary theory. The question is: how can we incorporate them into our undergraduate literature programs? What happens in the classroom when we introduce concepts such as those Chatman delineates in Story and Discourse? If we are to make use of Story and Discourse in our freshmen classrooms, we are faced with several alternatives. I will describe four of the more obvious ways of using Chatman's theory. Two of the four, the "sink or swim" and the "glossary" methods, I reject because they are less suitable to the context of the freshmen classroom than the two I advocate, the "Socratic" and the "comparative" methods.

1

Were we to teach Story and Discourse to freshmen, one alternative would be to include Chatman's book in the syllabus and to study its concepts directly and explicitly. What Chatman says could be presented in exactly the way in which he says it. Chatman's ideas could be studied as ideas. Some of the stories students read could illustrate concepts of plot, point of view, discourse, etc. Let me call this method, disdainfully, the SINK OR SWIM METHOD OF INSTRUCTION.

I do not believe this method works well in freshman English courses. Freshmen have little acquaintance with literary texts and none with theoretical discourse. Even though Chatman is far more accessible to the ordinary reader than, say, Lacan, his book assumes a long history of philosophic, linguistic and semiotic discussions of narrative problems. It draws its fundamental conceptual frames from Aristotle, DeSaussure, Barthes and others equally unfamiliar to freshmen. In places it is very technical. To hand a freshmen Story and Discourse on the assumption that, having read it, the student will be prepared to apply it to stories such as "Araby" is likely to produce nothing but frustration. Though this "sink or swim" method might work in a graduate seminar, it is not appropriate to freshman English.

Another alternative would be to present Chatman's ideas explicitly as his ideas but indirectly. Removing technical considerations, structuralist background, subtleties, one could make the concepts in Story and Discourse more accessible to students. Though mediated by a third party, the basic taxonomy could be preserved explicitly as Chatman's. In effect, Story and Discourse could be rewritten as a freshman text with numerous illustrations from stories to show how the taxonomy works. The students could learn a set of useful definitions, coherently interrelated, all applicable to the stories they are assigned to read. Let me call this the GLOSSARY METHOD OF INSTRUCTION.

This method is likely to prove less frustrating but no more successful than the first. We are all aware of how difficult it is to maintain student interest in an abstract set of ideas not immediately relatable to practical aspects of their everyday lives or clearly pertinent to the advance of their chosen careers. For most marketing, finance, accounting and management majors, the concepts in Story and Discourse have no personal value, no direct relationship to their experience. Moreover, the attempt to make the relatively technical nature of Chatman's concepts accessible to them is likely to result in watering down his ideas so much that his distinctions would seem, at best, trivial to students accustomed to the intricacies of finite mathematics, calculus, or other highly sophisticated and "relevant" intellectual systems.

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A third alternative is to present Chatman's concepts indirectly and implicitly. Without ever referring to Story and Discourse or without ever presenting Chatman's ideas as abstract concepts, carefully formulated questions could lead the class to make, on their own, the kinds of distinctions advocated in Story and Discourse. I assume that you recognize in this pedagogic strategy a variant of the SOCRATIC METHOD OF INSTRUCTION.

Most of you, I suspect, use this method to some degree in your classrooms. As a mode of instruction, it is in sharp contrast to the previous alternatives. Its underlying assumption is that even freshmen have some competence as readers; and it is their competence, not the knowledge of the teacher, that needs to be brought to light in the classroom.

We all know that the Socratic method works well in any classroom. And, we all know that there are two preconditions for its success. First, it is the formulation of the question, not the simple act of questioning, that has pedagogical value. Second, one cannot draw out of a student what that student does not possess. However unlikely it might seem from a distance, Story and Discourse gives us a way of meeting both of these preconditions. Let's take a closer look.

It is an increasingly well established principle that reading a text as literature involves the experience of "gaps," "fissures," "moments of unintelligibility," or "points of indeterminacy." Of course, it is not enough

simply to have sensed the gap, the unintelligibility or the indeterminacy. For freshmen, gaps are rarely more than frustrations. To get beyond the moment of frustration, it is necessary to formulate the underlying reading problem in such a way that the frustration can be reduced. A well-formulated question allows a student to identify certain features of the text, its intertexts, or certain extra-textual features as relevant to making sense of the passage in which the gap occurs and thus helps reduce the reader's frustration. If you ask a question about point of view in "Araby," for instance, the question is helpful only to the extent that it allows the reader to perceive certain features of "Araby" or of Dubliners's stories or of Joyce's biography as relevant to the ambivalence of the narration. Story and Discourse is very useful as a source of the well-defined terms needed to articulate such questions. But, of course, the Socratic method depends for its success on more than well-formulated questions.

Ultimately the effectiveness of a well-defined question about point of view in "Araby" depends upon the student's competence to recognize the textual features to which the question refers, for example, "the well-spoken diction" of the narrator. The Socratic method cannot take us farther than the literary competence of the students. Unfortunately, most freshmen are not in possession of the competence to recognize complex points of view, subtle ironies, differences between story and discourse. Fortunately, such literary competence is not innate. It is acquired. So, we must ask ourselves: how is it acquired? Obviously, one learns to read by reading. This is axiomatic. By reading many texts, a reader becomes increasingly competent to recognize their similarities and differences. This competence, in turn, enhances every subsequent reading act. But, if so, how can the taxonomic theory in Story and Discourse help the student who has not read enough to see the point of the distinctions Chatman is making?

iv

It is possible to present a taxonomy, not as a set of concepts, but as a set of differences between texts. Taxonomies make distinctions possible because textual features are recognizably distinctive. Thus, one might begin with recognizable contrasts between textual features rather than with conceptual distinctions that name the differences. One might, for example, contrast utterances belonging to the boy in "Araby," like "If I go I will bring you something" with utterances belonging to the narrator like "What innumerable follies laid waste my waking and sleeping thoughts after that evening," the very next sentence in the text in which there is a recognizable difference in diction. Whereas the "glossary" method uses actual texts as illustrations of the theory, this alternative presents texts simply as distinctive, i.e. as distinguishable. Conceptualization enters only when it becomes necessary to talk about the distinctiveness of the texts being read. In this alternative the theoretical enterprise is a reflection of the emerging competence of students to discriminate among the features of texts they are reading. Let's call this fourth alternative the COMPARATIVE METHOD OF INSTRUCTION.

This method, I believe, does work. It is not revolutionary. Most of you employ it to one degree or another, for the study of literature is fundamentally comparative. However, in the freshman classroom, we tend to use

this method haphazardly; and, to that extent, less effectively than we might. To link it with the direct though implicit use of Story and Discourse is, I will argue, of immense pedagogical value.

The basic pedagogical device of the comparative method is a simple, very specific set of instructions: look at this passage, then at that passage, then tell me what they have in common, then tell how their similarities simultaneously underscores their differences. Unfortunately, such comparisons are not usually made systematically on a wide scale. Our bulky anthologies often make the location of passages appropriate for comparison prohibitively time-consuming. Moreover, the underlying conceptual arrangements of most anthologies rarely allow one to make comparisons in a purposeful sequence, say, in a sequence related to the act of reading texts. But, when it does happen that we are able to present, in a purposeful way, a sequence of comparisons that give the student a growing feeling of confidence in approaching literary texts with the likelihood of making sense of them, we are doing our jobs as freshmen teachers. When this does happen, it happens because well-defined conceptions of the similarities underlying the comparison are specifiable; and because presentations are arranged in such a way that students can apprehend their purposefulness. To develop a program of this sort requires a theory base.

For example, how would we know which passages to select for comparison unless we already know which textual features can be compared or contrasted purposefully, i.e. unless we have to hand a well-motivated theory? How would we know what sequences within which to place each set of comparison/contrast instructions unless we already know how they are interrelated, what priorities belong to the act of reading or the act of analyzing a text, i.e. unless we have a theory attempting to explain one or the other basic skill?

V

Any theory that attempts to explain the process of reading or writing is germane to freshman English which is a basic skills course. We teach the basic skills of reading and writing, reading literature, writing about what we read. It is sensible to teach students how to read literary works before teaching them how to write about what they have been reading. So, let's consider what kind of skill reading is and how it can be related to the use of Story and Discourse in a comparative method of introducing freshmen to literary texts.

Reading is a recognition skill. It is not possible to understand a sentence unless you can recognize differences among the words on the page and differences among their functions in the group. The same kind of skill in recognition is required in the reading of a literary text. Textual features must be distinguished from each other. Some are easy to recognize, the sentences or phrases in which a narrator is telling the story as opposed to those in which the narrator is setting the scene or characterizing a figure in the story. Others are more difficult to recognize: various points of view, various modes of discourse, various ways of encoding the culture. Once again, Story and Discourse is a helpful resource, full of detailed delineations of just such features.

Reading skills often complement writing skills. For example, the recognition skills relevant to the act of reading are related to writing about literature.³ To talk about the similarities and differences among texts requires a critical terminology--concepts of textual similarities in particular, and hypotheses about form change, cultural encoding, etc., in general. Arguments about interpretive claims, especially conflicting ones, require, like all other arguments, warrants.⁴ Logically speaking, it is not possible to link evidence from the text to an interpretive claim without the explicit or implicit use of a warranting conception of texts, without generalizations about textual features. When we talk or write about a text we have to talk about texts in general to make ourselves understood because literary study is grounded in the comparison of texts. There is no way to recognize a textual feature from a single instance of it. The word recognition could not possibly apply. A critical terminology such as Chatman's is a precondition of our ability to read and write about literary texts. This precondition does not disappear when we teach freshmen.

vi

Let me summarize my argument from a slightly different perspective. In the past, the freshman's ability to recognize differential features of literary texts was greater than it is at present. The reasons seem obvious enough. Students no longer read as much as they did in the past. Since recognition skills are largely the product of the comparison of texts, the more texts students read, the more features they can recognize. But, what do we do to cope with the circumstance that present-day students have not read widely? Do we force them to read text after text until they have read as many as the students of yesteryear? This is not feasible. What, then, can be done?

The existence of taxonomic theories of textual features such as Chatman's Story and Discourse allow us to develop programs employing the Socratic and the comparative methods in which students can acquire, in a relatively short space of time, the recognition skills necessary to the task of reading texts like "Araby." Significantly, theoretical works like Story and Discourse also relate these fundamental recognition skills to areas of narration much closer to the competence our students actually enjoy--to films, comic strips, and the like. Our own good common sense, our own unexplicated literary competence is no longer sufficient. Recent theoretical texts are valuable in building a literature program precisely because they represent advances in the state of research into the study of literature, particularly into the reading and writing processes.

It is unfortunate that the history of our profession is a history of antagonism between graduate faculties and basic skills faculties. One wonders if this polarization has led us to believe, much to our own disadvantage, that research undertaken at the graduate level is incompatible with pedagogical practices at the undergraduate level. If so, it is probably a good omen that Seymour Chatman teaches in a department of rhetoric, for recent critical theory is not only useful to the freshman curriculum but vital to it.

NOTES

¹The reason I say that teaching deconstructive criticism is unfeasible is that it presupposes some already well-established critical praxis.

²(Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1978). I am using Chatman's book as an illustration of my general thesis and do not mean to suggest his is the only teachable theory or that his theory should be used exclusively.

³Warrants function in both reading and writing phases of the critical process. This is one of the implications of my argument in "Reading Acts and Reading Warrants: Some Implications for Readers Responding to Joyce's Portrait of Stephen," JJQ, 16 (Fall 78/Winter 79), 43-63.

⁴On this point see Siegfried Schmidt, "Literary Science As A Science of Argument," NLH, 7 (1976), 467-82. The term "warrant" is taken from Stephen Toulmin's The Uses of Argument (Cambridge: At the University Press, 1958). Toulmin's theory of argumentation, incidentally, has been used in freshmen composition texts.

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An Experiment in Criticism in the College Classroom:
Making Use of F.R. Leavis

by
William E. Cain

This essay is less an account of critical methods than a confession of failure. But I hope that my own problems in using criticism in the classroom may help others to do better, and to gauge more accurately how critical writing is best brought into classroom teaching and discussion.

At Wellesley, we require our English majors to take a course in "critical interpretation." It is really a course in "close reading," introducing students to the study of lyric poetry and to the writing of short analytical essays. Most members of the staff begin with Shakespeare's sonnets, proceed to Donne and Marvell, touch briefly on selections in Milton, Dryden, and Pope, and close with several weeks on the Romantics, especially Keats, Wordsworth, and Shelley. Most of us stick to a single text, often the Norton Anthology of Poetry, and do not recommend or require other readings: it is hard enough just to get the students to read the assigned poems. I am fortunate in having bright students to teach, but they are alienated from the act of reading closely and carefully, and are particularly uncomfortable with poetry. Like so many of our students, these English majors are very conscious of (and sometimes obsessed by) careers, jobs, future success in the business world. And they find it difficult to regard literature as more than an interesting, if on occasion profound, form of entertainment and diversion. Most of them do not see English as having a central interest and relevance to their lives. They are uncertain about what it means to be truly serious about literature, are doubtful about what it means to work hard at humanities courses generally, and are unsure about whether it is even worthwhile to consider doing so.

When I taught the course recently, I decided to spend the last couple weeks of the semester on Shelley. I was asking the students to read Shelley's poetry for a special reason; I wanted them to read some criticism, and F.R. Leavis's famous essay on Shelley in Revaluation seemed the perfect choice to me. I assigned Leavis in part because he is a critic I admire, however much I disagree with his judgments and dislike his polemics. He also struck me as the ideal critic for my students to read; as William Walsh remarks, "there is something in Leavis's work peculiarly attractive to the intelligent young, something to which the 'unestablished' intelligence is genuinely responsive." Leavis appeals, adds Walsh, to what the young mind seeks--"the combination of reference to a more organic, a more 'human' society with a severe critique of empty, fashionable forms, an equilibrium of positive and negative, answering both to the desire for reform and the impulse towards belief" (A Human Idiom: Literature and Humanity, pp. 121-122). I expected that my students would find Leavis to be challenging and insightful, and that he would serve as an

example of the kind of serious commitment to the humanities that they could emulate. For Leavis, the study of literature is essential not just for the "health" of the humanities, but for the life of the culture and society. As George Steiner aptly observes, Leavis's writings resonate with his conviction that criticism "need offer no apology" (Language and Silence, p. 225). And in asking my class to read Leavis, I wanted my students to recognize the crucial relationships between their analysis of literary texts and the powers of discrimination and judgment that one needs to live responsibly in the world.

My students hated Leavis's essay, though maybe I should state simply that they hated Leavis and could not understand why their teacher chose to make such a perverse assignment. The intensity of my students' response was partially my own fault. I should have been more aware of the anger that the Leavis style might kindle, and should, therefore, have spent more time telling my students about both the critic's life and career, his characteristic ways of working with and responding to texts, his belief in evaluation. It was this last point that especially troubled my students; they could not grasp why a critic would write about poems that he disdained. Another version of this response went as follows: how dare a critic presume to attack a creative writer? Who is Leavis to protest against the poetry of Shelley? To my students, the idea of actually making judgments about texts was barely conceivable; and as soon as the idea began to take shape for them, it was immediately rejected as presumptuous, arrogant, obnoxious.

In his essay, Leavis argues that Shelley's verse hypnotizes the reader into switching off his or her critical faculties. "This poetry," he asserts, "induces--depends for its success on inducing--a kind of attention that doesn't bring the critical intelligence into play: the imagery feels right, the associations work appropriately, if (as it takes conscious effort not to do) one accepts the immediate feeling and doesn't slow down to think" (Re-valuation, p. 207). This, to my students, was bad enough. But even worse was Leavis's insistence that Shelley's poetic failures call for "moral comment" on the writer himself. Shelley, he emphasizes, not only fails to satisfy the critically alert mind, but suffers from self-deceptions, insincerities, and a "radical lack of self-knowledge" (p. 221) that we are obliged to condemn.

Again I come back to the important if elusive word "serious." My students were baffled and angry at being made to read such serious criticism. They could not even approach the possibility that Leavis might be right about the poems that he discussed; his style and manner made it clear to my students that he had to be wrong. At times like this teachers can only reflect on their misguided assumptions. I had assumed that the Leavis essay would excite and intrigue my students, that it would rouse them to a stimulating discussion about Shelley, and give us some basic terms and issues for our study of Romanticism. There was also, I had to concede, a certain self-interest at work here; the element of self-justification, the need to back up the authority of our common pursuit, played its role in determining my choice of this particular critic.

I'm afraid that I cannot remember much in detail about the classes on Shelley other than that I was on the defensive most of the time and was anxious to get to Keats as quickly as possible. It was obvious that I had

not thought out the Leavis assignment well, and was unaware of the hostility that his essay would create. But when I next teach the course, I intend to require the essay again, because I realize now that it did not so much fail as work too well. Reading Leavis made the students see a serious critic in action--a critic deeply committed to literature, sensitive to the language of texts and to the necessity of keeping literature in relation to life. My students, I suspect, perceived what Leavis does, and they did what might unfortunately be described as the natural thing: they resisted the concentration and moral seriousness that he demands for the study of literature, for the "discipline" of English. Our students are not used to--perhaps one should say they do not care for--making judgments about what they read, and for realizing the connections between these acts of judgment and a life of real commitment and responsibility. To put this less moralistically, I should state that my students at Wellesley, like others I have taught elsewhere, are trapped by the assumption that judgments about texts are really just matters of personal opinion, and hence carry no disturbing force or impact: each person should be allowed his or her opinion and not be pressured to explain or defend it. Leavis, in his aggressive and sometimes overbearing way, stresses that such judgments are not mere statements of opinion, but are implicated in a network of social and cultural values. To maintain, he contends, that criticism is the play of opinions, and to be able to find ready assent to this view, is to say something sadly revealing about the condition of the society in which one lives.

But I do not want my references to Leavis to imply an uncritical admiration. As I have noted in a recent article (College English, September 1980), his theory is often more attractive than his practice, and especially late in his career, he lets judgments sit without elaboration and substitutes quotation for the type of analysis that he provides in Revaluation and the early books. And I also do not wish my account to appear as an indictment of my students. Anxiety, fear, and uncertainty lie behind their assumptions about everyone's right to his or her opinion, and the tragic truth is that these assumptions, so common today, victimize the people who adhere to them. Fearful about the future and even skeptical about the worth of their own ideas, students slip into a life of accepting what they are given, and are unable to question or protest against the forms of exploitation that our society practices almost as part of the expected course of things. My students are not accustomed to being critical about their own experiences and the world in which they live and hope to secure careers.

And for this habit of thought their teachers may bear some of the blame. Though I risk sounding self-righteous, I think that we teachers and critics are often our own worst enemies, and do not serve our students well. The humanities, we know, are in crisis, and still harder times are ahead as the predictions about declining enrollments, shrinking budgets, oversupplies of Ph.D's turn into even more pressing realities. Sometimes the unsettling facts lead us to defeatism and doomsaying; the evidence seems compelling, and so we accept our troubled, marginal status and try to devise ways of enticing students away, at least for a while, from their economics, chemistry, and biology courses. Making a sharp and serious case for our work appears at times to require more effort and energy than we possess.

Of course we still fasten readily on new ways and methods of working.

Recently, for example, we have witnessed the rise of the new continental methodologies--deconstruction, post-structuralism, semiotics. And some critics, notably Paul de Man, J. Hillis Miller, and others at Yale, have argued that this new "new criticism" promises bold directions and opportunities for the humanities. I admire and am very interested in the writings of these critics, as I am also interested in the work of Barthes, Derrida, Foucault, and others. But I find both the advocacy and opposition to the new continental criticism to be a depressing spectacle; the arguments are heated and sometimes exhilarating, yet somehow it all seems so much like business as usual. Charged issues appear to be in the air, and debates are conducted in rarified vocabularies. Yet in an almost eerie conjunction, our discussion of Barthes and the others plays right into the hands of our students, who are instantly able to translate the pleasures of the text into an argument for complete freedom and subjectivity ('it's all opinion anyway') in interpretation.

Which is why I return to Leavis. Reading him is unnerving, because he demands that we consider some hard questions about why we teach literature, why we write criticism, and whether we truly feel the connections between literary study and life. Leavis has to be read critically; to accept his judgments without qualification and dissent would be to renege on the very principles he teaches us. But as a way of reminding ourselves of the function of literary study, and as a beginning attempt to promote the powers of analysis and judgment among our students, I can think of no more necessary and commanding figure. He offers us a compelling place from which to take new bearings.

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Critical Theory and the English Classroom

by
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Anyone acquainted with a college or university literature department has probably noticed the interest that members of these departments now have in critical theory--an interest so strong one writer recently described it as "an extraordinary fascination."¹ The teacher of literature in the schools will naturally wonder whether contemporary critical theory has useful implications for his or her classroom. An earlier group of theorists, the Anglo-American "New Critics," certainly did change the teaching of literature at all levels: will, say, the "Yale Critics" (principally Harold Bloom, J. Hillis Miller, Geoffrey Hartmann, and Paul de Man) do something similar? The direct way to answer this question would be to attempt an application of, say, Bloom's theory of "misreading" to poetry regularly taught in the secondary school. In what follows, I will proceed less directly: I will offer a rule-of-thumb for gauging whether any particular application of contemporary theory to the classroom is likely to be fruitful.

Here is my rule-of-thumb: Students are likely to find the concepts of a critical theory valuable if they can see how the concepts arise from struggling with difficulties actually encountered in interpreting or appreciating literary works. This encounter should take place prior to the students' introduction to the theory--or at least it should be possible for things to happen in this order. In other words, the function of the critical concepts is to resolve difficulties, not to create them in the first place.

I take this statement to resemble broadly John Dewey's view that the medium of education is the student's experience. By "experience" Dewey did not mean what people currently mean by "personal experience"--idiosyncratic experience acquired largely out of school; rather, he meant the student's direct acquaintance with the process of turning a disorganized or puzzling situation into an ordered and intelligible one. I also believe this rule-of-thumb is compatible with John Holt's observation in How Children Fail that

a problem is a picture with a piece missing; the answer is the missing piece. The children who take time to see, and feel, and grip the problem, soon find that the answer is there. The ones who get in trouble are the ones who see a problem as an order to start running at top speed from a given starting point, in an unknown direction to an unknown destination.²

In Holt's terms, my suggestion is that critical concepts are valuable insofar as they help students, after prolonged scrutiny of the incomplete picture, to find the missing piece. The introduction of a new critical concept into the

classroom fails if students cannot see it as something to think with--as more than another place to run in panic after the starting-gun of an exam sounds.

II

My rule-of-thumb assumes, among other things, that literary works do present problems that can be the occasion for introducing critical concepts. Not everyone accepts this assumption. Some theorists believe that a text has no definite character--not even a problematic one--until it is placed in some critical perspective. The issue here, the relation between theory and evidence in literary study, is too complex to be resolved in a short discussion. I hope to muster some support for my rule-of-thumb, however, by identifying and illustrating one kind of problem a text may present on its own. I further intend my example to show that Holt's view of how thought proceeds--by finding the answer in the problem--is an apt description of how we think about at least some literary works.

In the course of reading certain works, the proper thing for a reader to understand or to infer at a specific point is that such-and-such matter has to be explained or resolved. In these cases, a problem arises not because the reader has stepped back and asked himself a question, but simply because the reader has been following the text, i.e., trying to make continuous sense of it. Since a reader expects a work as a whole to have a coherent meaning, making such an inference exerts an influence on his other inferences; once a reader has a problem in mind, he does not attend to just any meanings the words of a text could possibly have, but to the meanings that seem relevant to that problem.

The poem below is by James Wright:

Lying in a Hammock at William Duffy's Farm in
Pine Island, Minnesota

Over my head, I see the bronze butterfly,
Asleep on the black trunk,
Blowing like a leaf in green shadow.
Down the ravine behind the empty house,
The cowbells follow one another
Into the distances of the afternoon.
To my right,
In a field of sunlight between two pines,
The droppings of last year's horses
Blaze into golden stones.
I lean back, as the evening darkens and comes on.
A chicken-hawk floats over, looking for home.
I have wasted my life.

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Imagine for a moment Wright's poem with its title changed to "Lying in a Hammock on the Farm" and its last line omitted. In reading this altered version of the poem, a reader would face the "problem" of what to make of the poem as a whole, but he would not encounter a problem in the sense I have

just described. There would be no point at which what he made of the speaker's report of sights and sound would give rise to a problem to be resolved. In the poem as we have it, however, the last line is such a point: While the speaker's declaration, "I have wasted my life," is clear enough, it prompts the reader to wonder why the speaker makes the declaration now.

To appreciate how a problem like this directs the reader's attention, consider again the poem in its altered version. One could try to unify the abridged poem in terms of a dominant mood or feeling. For instance, one might take the speaker to be luxuriating in rest and inactivity. In support of this view, one could cite the association of lying in a hammock with "loafing around" and point out that the speaker lies in his from afternoon to dusk. Other details would fit too: There is no reference to any work being done on the farm, and even the butterfly the speaker sees is asleep. When one is reviewing the full poem with the problem it poses in mind, however, one does not simply sift details for a common denominator. The full title indicates that the speaker is a visitor or guest at William Duffy's farm, and this lets the reader infer that the life the speaker feels he has wasted has been lived elsewhere. At this point, a reader has--to return to Holt's figure--a good idea of the piece he needs: He needs to discover what about the speaker's immediate experience makes him reject this other life. I believe a reader might well decide that the speaker finds a quiet beauty in his present surroundings and rejects his life because it apparently lacks this beauty. A full presentation of this reading would be lengthy, and I will consider only the poem's first three lines. I mentioned that someone trying to unify the abridged poem might take the butterfly's being asleep as thematically significant. Now of course the reader of the full poem also notices that the butterfly is asleep, but this detail is not especially significant for him. Again, this reader is trying to find a cause for the speaker's later, surprising judgment, and this detail offers him no clue. For the reader coming to the lines with this interest in mind, the butterfly's state merely allows the speaker to have a sustained view of it. What is important to this reader is the pleasing combination of colors that the speaker reports in--the bronze on black in green shadow: important because this color scheme can be used to support the inference that the speaker finds what he sees and hears attractive.

III

To conclude, two further remarks on what I've done: (1) My discussion of Wright's poem is a particularly pure example of Holt's notion of solving a problem by scrutinizing the contours of the problem itself: so pure that I can imagine someone saying what my discussion shows is that we should just read texts carefully and ignore critical theory altogether. This seems to me the wrong moral to draw, since puzzling over some aspects of literary works will naturally take us farther from what's immediately at hand than I had to go. Part of Northrop Frye's motive as a theorist appears to have been his effort to explain the striking resemblances among--Frye would say identity of--images in poems from different times and places.³ Frye's problem: obviously required that he look for a solution beyond the confines of a single text. But since his problem can be encountered prior to a theory of archetypes, Frye's work would meet the test I have proposed. And in fact, a series

of literature textbooks based on Frye's theory has been used in the schools for some time--used with success I'm told.⁴ Recently, J. Hillis Miller, reflecting on the responsibilities of the teacher of literature, stated that the first phase of teaching a poem is "subjecting oneself to the words on the page."⁵ If Miller's practical criticism originated in this "subjecting," as he implies it does, then there is no reason in principle why even the Deconstructionist's sleights-of-hand could not meet my test.

(2) I have cited John Holt to help me identify a guideline for applying theory in the classroom. Now Holt clearly believes teaching that turns around problems has an intrinsic value--that is, a value apart from whatever students might learn about mathematics or poetry--and I would like to record my firm agreement with him. The way we introduce critical concepts into the classroom affects not only whether our students can eventually wield these methods, but whether they develop "critical" minds in the broader sense of being patient, careful, and attentive to evidence. As Holt observes: "The true test of intelligence is not how much we know how to do, but how we behave when we don't know what to do."⁶

NOTES

¹Irvin Ehrenpreis, "Lit in Trouble," New York Review of Books, 26, No. 11 (1979), 40. A reader interested in the sources of this "fascination" might well consult Ehrenpreis's brief but interesting discussion of the matter at the beginning of this essay.

²John Holt, How Children Fail (New York: Dell, 1964), p. 46.

³See for example, Northrop Frye, "The Archetypes of Literature," Fables of Identity (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1963), p. 12.

⁴The series, for grades 7-12, is Literature: Uses of the Imagination, published by Harcourt, Brace, Janovich.

⁵J. Hillis Miller, "Theory and Practice: Response to Vincent Leitch," Critical Inquiry, 6 (1980), 613.

⁶Holt, p. 165.

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The Abyss of Interpretation

by
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"...The Poet, he nothing affirmeth,"
Sir Philip Sidney, The Defence of Poesie

Literary theory has a contribution to make to the English classroom because the act of interpretation, which is central to the teaching of literature and to any idea of literary competence, cannot be a fixed procedure, for it is subject to constant change. "Interpretation," as Susan Sontag reminded us, "is not (as most people assume) an absolute value, a gesture of mind situated in some timeless realm of capabilities. Interpretation must itself be evaluated, within a historical view of human consciousness."¹ The service of literary theory is to keep the act of interpretation continually in question and, by so doing, to give that act the creative vitality that an absolute procedure can never have. Theory, then, can communicate creativity to the teaching of literature through its constant questioning of teaching's essential act, interpretation.

Of course, literature itself, as it changes, challenges fixed modes of interpretation by absorbing and reacting to these modes. Indeed, these two fictions, literature and interpretation, will proceed with their dialogue without benefit of theory. But theory, itself a genre, enjoys the role of agent provocateur in the relation between these two establishments and has the aim, if you will, of revolutionizing that relationship. It can constantly renew this provocative function because the essence of literature, like that of humanity, continually eludes definition. "To read or interpret or assess a work of literature is," John Reichert observes, "to read or interpret or assess it as something...."² But literary texts have an unsettling way of negating, of not being, the latest thing that interpretation has seen them as: not history, not biography, not philosophy, not myth, not ideology, not rhetoric--and not this or that favored set of criteria through which the critic claims to see, at last, "literature as literature." There is a troublesome nothingness, an abyss, within the being of literature. So while interpretation strives, as it must, for settlement with the work in question, theory keeps insisting on better terms. From fields, or jungles, of thought often far removed from literature, literary theory imports new modes of "seeing as," new perspectives, that disrupt the interpretive peace we have made for ourselves with the works we teach.

Literary theory can serve in the English classroom, can generate creative reading, by way of the questions it puts to the act of interpretation. There are risks involved, of course, but these are the risks of creativity. Theory keeps up its questioning because great literary works insist on being seen from an unlimited number of perspectives; this is the abyss, the nothingness, of meaning in them. Yet the range of perspectives that will be allowed

in any particular classroom, and the degree to which the act of interpretation itself will be in question there, will depend upon the responsiveness of the teacher to the questions posed by theory and upon his or her belief that literary theory, itself a language art, can stimulate the same qualities of creative inquiry in students. The teacher's answer to these possibilities will, in turn, depend, upon his or her perception of the validity or inescapability of at least the primary questions that theory has asked of interpretation. But no answer can be given without awareness of the question. For this reason I propose to review here just three of the more searching and, it may be thought, dangerous questions that contemporary literary theory has posed. With this, perhaps the most vital line of current inquiry, in mind the teacher can consider which positions, if any, are persuasive enough to merit further study.

1

Probably the most troublesome question that twentieth century literary theory has posed interpretation is this: Can we dispose of the author in interpretations? Is it possible or necessary to refer a poem, say, to what its author "meant" when we try to express its meaning? Either the meaning of the poem is complete and unique in the poem itself or it must be referred to some external meaning or cause, the most privileged of these possibilities being, some hold, the author's "intention." Obviously the teacher's position on this issue is of enormous importance to the kind of literature class he or she conducts. And this distinction between "intrinsic" and "extrinsic" theories of literature is that proposed by René Wellek and Austin Warren in their Theory of Literature, still the best survey of the subject. But the teacher's response to the idea of interpreting a work without considering its author's intention would probably be an unqualified rejection of that procedure unless he or she was aware of the persuasive objections raised by the New Critics, the most influential force in Anglo-American literary theory since the 1940s, to considering the author's intended meaning or any other extrinsic meaning in interpreting or evaluating the work. For these critics, a poem does not communicate some authorial meaning that can be isolated as such; it achieves its particular meaning in and through its uniquely unified form; its meaning can never be expressed outside its form. The poem doesn't mean, they say; it is. We will consider this position further in the next question; right now, however, we must restate the "classical" position on authorial meaning, one that many teachers are likely to take.

No, they would assert, we cannot dispense with the author as we interpret. The literary work is a kind of veiled communication from the author to the reader. It may, indeed, be seen from many perspectives, referred to many external orders of "truth," but the only valid or privileged reference is to what the meaner, the author, meant. Others, however, see serious problems in attempting to recover the moment of formed meaning the author had in mind when he composed the work. Yet in the past decade the approach to interpretation through authorial intention has had an articulate champion in the theoretical writings of E.D. Hirsch. In two controversial studies, Validity in Interpretation and The Aims of Interpretation, he has defined a position on the relevance of authorial meaning that many teachers have long accepted in practice, though it remains problematic. "Of course," he writes, the words

of a text can be respoken from a new perspective and a new meaning formulated. Of course, as some critics insist, the reader can become a self-imagining author. But a text cannot be interpreted from a perspective different from the original author's. Meaning is understood from the perspective that lends existence to meaning."³ For Hirsch, then, "interpretation is the construction of another's meaning."⁴ Any other perspective will, at best, reveal the "significance," not the "meaning," of the text. So the interpreter's essential task is "a deliberate reconstruction of the author's subjective stance to the extent that this stance is relevant to the text at hand."⁵

In an article reprinted in Validity in Interpretation Hirsch illustrates his case for authorial intention by presenting two contradictory yet "expert" readings of Wordsworth's Lucy poem "A Slumber Did My Spirit Seal" followed by his resolution of the interpretive problem these readings raise. I wish to reproduce this illustration here, not only because other theorists have commented on it but because it represents a situation that, with a little effort, we can imagine as occurring in the classroom. First, the assigned poem:

A Slumber did my spirit seal;
I had no human fears:
She seemed a thing that could not feel
The touch of earthly years.

No motion has she now, no force,
She neither hears nor sees;
Rolled round in earth's diurnal course,
With rocks, and stones, and trees.

And now we have an interpretation from an unusually perceptive "student," Cleanth Brooks, who takes an intrinsic view of the poem:

(Wordsworth) attempts to suggest something of the lover's agonized shock at the loved one's present lack of motion--of his response to her utter and horrible inertness.... He chooses to suggest it...by imagining her in violent motion....Part of the effect, of course, resides in the fact that a dead lifelessness is suggested more sharply by an object's being whirled about by something else than by an image of the object in repose. But there are other matters which are at work here: the sense of the girl's falling back into the clutter of things, companioned by things chained like a tree to one particular spot, or by things completely inanimate, like rocks and stones....She is touched by and held by earthly time in its most powerful and horrible image.⁶

But another good "student," F.W. Bateson, draws upon his knowledge of the author and arrives at a quite different reading:

But the final impression the poem leaves is not of two contrasting moods, but of a single mood mounting to a climax in the pantheistic magnificence of the last two

lines....The vague living-Lucy of this poem is opposed to the grander dead-Lucy who has become involved in the sublime processes of nature....Lucy is actually more alive now that she is dead, because she is now a part of the life of Nature and not just a human "thing."

So our imaginary teacher is confronted with two mutually incompatible but presumably competent interpretations of the poem. Does this mean that one is wrong or that the poem is deeply ambiguous? In one reading the poet is expressing pessimistic and unconsolated feelings at the loved one's transformation into mere thingness; in the other the poet is consoled by the idea of the dead Lucy's absorption into the one life of Nature that "pantheism" equates with the Deity. Which reading is to be preferred? Of course, our teacher may attempt to evaluate the two interpretations by some set of logical criteria of competence; that is, he or she may assume, for example, as John Reichert does, "that of two conflicting interpretations the better is the one that accounts for the words of the text more completely, simply, consistently, and coherently."⁸ Or the teacher may, as Walter A. Davis proposes, attempt to discern the "purposive principle"⁹ immanent in the form of the work and therefore prefer the interpretation that accounts most comprehensively for the parts of the poem in terms of this inherent purpose. But it is doubtful that either of these approaches would compel a pantheistic reading of the poem. For Hirsch, however, such strategies can only yield perspectival readings that merely suggest the poem's "significance"; determinate "meaning" requires knowing what another meant. So his solution to the problem posed by these contradictory readings of Wordsworth's poem is to remind us that the poet's "characteristic attitudes are somewhat pantheistic," that "instead of regarding rocks and stones and trees merely as inert objects, he probably regarded them in 1799 as deeply alive, as part of the immortal life of nature.... From everything we know of Wordsworth's typical attitudes during the period in which he composed the poem, inconsolability and bitter irony do not belong to its horizon."¹⁰ He therefore validates Bateson's interpretation as being closer to the meaning of the poem.

But couldn't it be possible, even likely, some students may ask, that the very loss that was the occasion for the poem caused the poet to question his "typical attitudes" by means of the poem? Couldn't this have been his true intention? Obviously there will be difficulties with Hirsch's solution, particularly for the teacher (or student) who, while unwilling to accept the Brooks reading in every detail, does not find in the poem itself the pantheistic consolation that Hirsch's "intended" reading (for him the only determinate meaning) requires. Broadly speaking, these difficulties are of two kinds: problems in verifying the "intended" reading and questions concerning the status of "unintended" readings, like Brooks'.

The classroom in which Hirsch's thesis is accepted has before it a difficult, perhaps impossible, task in the archeology of intention. "A Slumber Did My Spirit Seal" obviously does not express the same degree of pantheistic confidence as, say, "Tintern Abbey"; so in arriving at the determinate meaning of this poem it will not do to reconstruct the poet's "typical attitudes" merely; we will need to know the precise horizon of intention, the real degree of pantheistic consolation the poet was able to feel in the face of the

particular loss that occasioned the poem in 1799. This task would require us to assemble and weigh carefully the historical and biographical determinants of that momentary state of mind. This could lead us into limitless efforts to recover a particular tone of consciousness, into an infinite succession of approximations that we might call the abyss of intention.

But there are other considerations. Suppose we have managed to reconstruct the poet's intention from sources outside the poem; what if we find that he has egregiously failed in that intention (as may be the case with the poem in question) yet has written a poem that continues to move us? Could it be that in the act of writing the poem, in the ordering of its words, some formative intention in the work itself--an intention of which the poet may not have been entirely conscious--took control? Authorial intention may be a will-o'-wisp, then; yet Hirsch has warned that to banish this factor is "to reject the only compelling normative principle that could lend validity to an interpretation."¹¹ But doesn't the poem itself carry on an existence (and relations with its readers) independent of its author's intention? Doesn't the text, if closely read, exert normative control over the readings of it? These considerations lead us to the second major question that literary theory has posed to interpretation.

2

What does it mean to read a work "as literature"? Surely the insistence of some teachers that we "read literature as literature" is a slogan that conceals at best a particular theory of interpretation. To read is to interpret, and to interpret is to "see as." To see literature as literature is to see it in terms of certain aesthetic criteria which define the way a literary work can mean and also its uniqueness as discourse. When E.D. Hirsch advocated authorial intention as a norm of validity in interpretation he was opposing the crucial values of a creative, critical, and theoretical movement which had been dominant in this country from the 1940s to the mid sixties, when its influence began to wane in academic circles under the impact of new philosophical and linguistic theories imported from Europe. With his "extrinsic" theory of literary meaning he was opposing the "intrinsic" or "formalist" positions of the New Critics.¹² The history of that movement (it includes such critics as John Crowe Ransome, Allen Tate, R.P. Blackmur, William Empson, Cleanth Brooks, W.K. Wimsatt, Jr., and Monroe C. Beardsley; and it numbers Kant, Coleridge, and Croce among its philosophical forebears) cannot concern us here; our interest is in the positions it takes on reading literature for itself.

It may be pardonable if we review the complex doctrines of the New Critics by gathering them around three rather ponderous "o"-words: objective, organic, ontological. First, objectivity. For the New Critics, now by no means new, the valued poem is sui generis, a uniquely unified and complex verbal object; its language is to be read closely and objectively for the way it functions in the poem, not for the response it arouses in the reader. The work is not to be regarded in terms of any meaning or mode of truth but its own; it is not to be, cannot be, translated into any other mode of discourse (history, philosophy, theology, psychology, etc.); nor is it to be referred to the intention of its author; for a poem can never be reduced to its "causes," and authorial intention is just another cause. The poem is neither

the reader's nor the author's; it is a kind of self-reflective or mirrored enclosure; its meaning and its being are one and unique. The poem's objectivity is summed up in the famous last two lines of Archibald MacLeish's "Ars Poetica": "A poem should not mean/ But be."

Not all would-be poems achieve "being," however. To do so for the New Critics a poem has to meet certain aesthetic criteria. Chief among these is organic form, which means the interdependence of all parts, the integrity of the whole, the form unfolding itself from within, and something more (from Coleridge): evidence of the special ability of the poetic imagination to integrate the opposed and discordant qualities of experience into a harmonious whole, a vital whole that the critic murders to dissect. So the New Critic tends to see the poem as exhibiting a quality of "tension" between its "logical structure" and the details of its "local texture"; hence the internal dynamic of the poem approximates, in these critics' view, the contradictory sensations of lived experience brought to a higher degree of resolution. For this reason the New Critic tends to value complexity, intensity, and density in a poem and to place special emphasis, in interpretation, on the presence of paradox, irony, or ambiguity. Ultimately, the New Critic locates the literary essence in irony or ambiguity that is resolved only in the experience, the being or "achieved content," of a particular work; this experienced meaning, he supposes, can never be fully expressed in any other language but the poem's and to attempt to do so is to commit what Cleanth Brooks called "the heresy of paraphrase."

So the New Critic's answer to our second question is that to read a poem for itself, "as literature," is to encounter a complex organism of subtle and often contradictory verbal nuances that are shaped from within into a whole that is greater than the sum of its parts. The experience of the particular synthesis that is the individual poem is unique and essentially untranslatable. This uniqueness depends upon the experienced resolution of the poem's many ambiguities or suggestive indeterminacies. Therefore in a New Critical interpretation much depends upon the way in which ambiguities of "texture" create suggestions, half-formed meanings, that are ultimately controlled by the organic totality of the work, including its rational and rhythmic "structure." The crucial question, of course, is whether these ambiguities are resolved into determinate meaning by the text (Hirsch would say they are not) or whether there are such limitless shadings of ambiguity in any text that any particular reading is merely a moment in the endless process of interpreting it, and therefore interpretation slides, in this direction, into the abyss of ambiguity.

William Empson, whose Seven Types of Ambiguity is one of the key texts of New Criticism, wrote that ambiguity is "any verbal nuance, however slight, which gives room for alternative reactions to the same piece of language."¹² Whether there may be seven types of ambiguity or numberless types is open to question, but clearly the task of the New Critical interpreter is to make clear which implications or ranges of implication belong to the poem since they are controlled by its totality of effect and which are irrelevant. Of course, there is a problem of interpretive circularity in this: how can we know the meaning of the whole that controls the nuances of the parts until we have fastened down the meanings of the parts? Nonetheless the New Critical

interpreter is convinced that such difficulties can be resolved by intrinsic means, that is, by careful explication and cross-referral of verbal and rhythmic suggestions raised by the text. Thus Monroe Beardsley, an "instinctive" theorist, has recently affirmed, against Hirsch's position, that "texts acquire determinate meaning through the interactions of their words without the intervention of an authorial will. When possible meanings are transformed into an actual meaning, this transformation is generated by the possibilities...themselves."¹³ But the central question for us--and it is ultimately a classroom question--is whether literary texts control their own possibilities or whether they require, if not authorial intention, then the reader's. And does each of these apparent controls recede into the abyss when the interpreter attempts to fix its limits?

When Beardsley takes up the disputed poem, "A Slumber Did My Spirit Seal," he brings one of its major ambiguities into focus. "If the speaker is suggesting that Lucy and trees are like rocks and stones, we have a hint of mechanistic materialism. If he is suggesting that rocks and stones and Lucy are like trees, then we have a hint of pantheism (or at least animism)."¹⁴ Of course, the four are being "Rolled round in earth's diurnal course"; so the critic suggests that the ambiguity might be relieved here by exploring the connotations of "rolled." But since the repertoire of connotations of "rolled" includes everything vital or inert that can be rolled, we roll into the abyss of ambiguity this way. However, Beardsley concludes that this particular rolling, in its "diurnal course," must at least be regular, comparatively slow, gentle, orderly and circular; since there is nothing inherently "terrifying or demeaning" in these connotations, we must allow, if we accept them, that "the poem contains a hint of pantheism, or at least animism."¹⁵

But to another reader who may be equally submissive to the interactions of the words in the text itself there will be no restrictive connotations here to carry the reading beyond the thingness of the "rolled" Lucy. None of the connotations Beardsley points to compels the idea of continued life. So for this reader there will be little consolation in the poem, though perhaps not the bitterness Brooks describes. Here, for instance, is the relevant portion of another explication in the New Critical style which, on textual evidence, now including metrical effects, reaches a conclusion quite different from Beardsley's and, of course, from what Hirsch would regard as the valid reading:

The last two lines of the poem emphasize again the complete lack of animation that characterizes death; Lucy is equated with rocks and stones and trees. Paradoxically, although she has no motion, she is roll'd round. The paradox, too, serves to emphasize her lack of animation; she is the powerless thing to which motion is imparted by the turning of the earth.

The metrical structure of the second stanza does much to reinforce its basic mood of grief and shock:

Nó mótiõn hás shē nów, || nó fórcē;
Shē néithēr héars nōr sées;
Róll'd róund ín éarth's díurnāl cóurse,
Wíth rócks, || ánd stónes, || ánd trées.

The substitute spondees in the first and fourth feet of the first line, together with the caesura before the fourth foot, give added emphasis to the negation of motion and force, and they make the line move slowly and heavily in sharp contrast to the rapid, light movement of the last two lines of the first stanza. Again, the spondee in the first foot of the third line imparts a heaviness to the movement of the line and prepares for the slow, heavy movement produced by the two caesuras in the last line.¹⁶

For this reader, then, the connotations add up to the inertness of Lucy, and there is no animistic or pantheistic consolation for the poet. Between embittering loss for the poet (Brooks) and the other possible extreme of consolation lie countless other readings, all to be obtained by assembling slightly different networks of nuances. So without the control of "intention" (itself an abyss) we fall into the abyss of ambiguity as each reading of the poem becomes a moment in the endless process of "seeing as."

One more observation on New Critical theory of literature before we pass on to our third big question. Recall that the third guiding "o"-word we associated with New Criticism was "ontology." We have seen that abyss of implication seems to yawn beneath the effort to recover the right network of implications in a poem--numberless gradations of vitality for Lucy (whatever she may mean) in the speaker's suggested experience. In interpreting, we necessarily translate the language of the poem into other words, these into adjusted words, and so forth. But as we do so we keep sliding along from words to words, never coming out of the "prison-house" of language into being. Now, for the New Critics, a poem is; it transcends language into being by virtue of the symbol, which, as Coleridge wrote, "partakes of the reality which renders it intelligible." But does the symbol have this special link with being? Does literary discourse have any privileged access from language to things?

Perhaps, but in leaving the New Critics we should take note of the fact that certain contemporary theorists, led by Jacques Derrida, have attacked this notion on grounds derived from Saussurean linguistics. Ferdinand de Saussure had pointed out that the relation between any particular sound-image (signifier) and its associated concept (signified) is arbitrary: "the linguistic sign is arbitrary." Furthermore, language creates meaning by differences; "in language there are only differences without positive terms."¹⁷ For Derrida, this means that there is nothing outside text, no center or transcendental signified to coerce the order of words; there is no Ariadne's thread through the endless labyrinth of intertextuality. What the interpreter encounters is merely "difference," according to Derrida; by this neologism he indicates his view that texts are constructed of difference and delay, the constant deferral of any non-linguistic meaning. So Derrida and his followers leave not only literature but all discourse without that presence of being that the New Critics found in the symbol. Without bonds to the non-linguistic, discourse is, in Derrida's phrase, "mise en abyme."

We have seen that the effort to interpret a work in terms of its author's "inner horizon" at the moment of its composition leads to historical, biographical and psychological complexities which we might call the abyss of

intention. On the other hand, it appears that the effort to arrive at an objective and intrinsic reading of the text as a complex organism of verbal nuances leads, through the isolation that is claimed for the text, to limitless interpreted combinations of nuances, the abyss of ambiguity. So now, having seen what difficulties arise in the attempts to isolate authorial and textual meaning, we are naturally led to the third major question that theory must ask of interpretation.

3

What is the reader's relation to the text? Can the mutual implication of text and reader provide any basis for a different mode of interpretation? After all, it may be argued, the meaning of a literary work is not the author's horizon of intention at the moment of writing, nor is it something hidden in the complex verbal object; meaning is something that happens when a text is read or "performed" by the individual reader. Meaning is therefore not a static content to be defined but an event or an effect. Interpretation, it follows, is not the definition of meanings but the description of functions in the text which serve to position the reader in certain ways. This approach may owe something to New Criticism's concern with the functions operating in a text, but it owes nothing to that criticism's objective isolation of the text and its effort to harmonize all ambiguities into one specific totality of meaning; on the contrary, this theory does not think of the text as the vehicle of a single meaning but as a structure of potentialities that the individual reader actualizes in a unique way. Undoubtedly this approach, sometimes called reader-response criticism, directs interpretation into the abyss of response. But there is an important difference. For the intentionalist interpreter there can be only one intention behind (or within) any unified work, and for the intrinsic critic only one organic harmony of the text's ambiguities, but for the reader-response critic the directions of the text allow for an infinity of actualizations. The abyss is accepted. From this perspective Wordsworth's Lucy poem might be interpreted as directing the reader's response toward certain specific "points of indeterminacy" (e.g. the dead Lucy's final relation to rocks and stones and trees) which the reader cannot but fill in his or her own way.

For the teacher who may wish to consider the classroom implications of this approach, the best beginning is with Wolfgang Iser's The Act of Reading, though he confines the practical demonstrations of his procedure to fiction. (Some comparable help with the poetic text will be found in the chapter on the "Poetics of the Lyric" in Jonathan Culler's Structuralist Poetics as Culler attempts to define the "interpretive conventions" that govern the reading of a lyric.) For Iser, each text (not the genre, as in Culler) positions and directs its reader in its own specific ways; that is, it contains its own "implied reader." The real reader brings his or her own predispositions to the text, but the text offers the reader a specific role to play in grasping it; "the implied reader designates a network of response-inviting structures, which impel the reader to grasp the text." The reader's role is thus a "textual structure" which "will be fully implemented only when it induces structured acts in the reader";¹⁸ however, the points at which real reader and structured role converge and meet cannot be linguistically expressed, so they must be imagined. Iser's theory is somewhat intricate, but central to it is the notion that each text communicates as a unique and complex

network of "gaps" or "blanks" which invoke the reader's side of the communicative process. "Whenever the reader bridges the gaps, communication begins. The gaps function as a kind of pivot on which the whole text-reader relationship revolves. Hence the structured blanks of the text stimulate the process of ideation to be performed by the reader on terms set by the text." There are also points at which the reader's expectations are negated, and they must be redirected. "Blanks and negations both control the process of communication in their own different ways: the blanks leave open the connections between perspectives in the text, and so spur the reader into coordinating these perspectives.... The various types of negation invoke familiar or determinate elements only to cancel them out. What is cancelled, however, remains in view, and thus brings about modifications in the reader's attitude toward what is familiar or determinate--in other words, he is guided to adopt a position in relation to the text."¹⁹

These brief excerpts are meant to suggest the important contribution to interpretation that this approach can make. It overcomes both the departure from the details of the text that intentionalist interpretation involves, and the isolation of the text from the individual reader's constitutive activity that the single-meaning intrinsic approach dictates. It thus restores controlled creativity to the act of interpretation. New Critical dogma notwithstanding, the text itself has no being; it is a lack, awaiting the individual reader's living choices for its being. As Serge Doubrovsky has observed, "I do not confront a literary work as though confronting the plenitude of an object that is or that has been: the work is still to be, and I make it be. (The actor, less simpleminded than many critics, knows that any text is always still to be interpreted.)"²⁰

NOTES

¹Susan Sontag, Against Interpretation and Other Essays (New York, 1966), pp. 6-7.

²John Reichert, Making Sense of Literature (Chicago, 1977), p. 134.

³E.D. Hirsch, Jr., The Aims of Interpretation (Chicago, 1976), p. 49.

⁴E.D. Hirsch, Jr., Validity in Interpretation (New Haven, 1967), p. 244.

⁵Ibid., p. 238.

⁶Cleanth Brooks, "Irony as a Principle of Structure," in Literary Opinion in America, ed. M.D. Zabel (2d ed. New York, 1951), p. 736.

⁷F.W. Bateson, English Poetry: A Critical Introduction (London, 1950), pp. 33, 80-81.

⁸Making Sense of Literature, p. 97.

⁹Walter A. Davis, The Act of Interpretation (Chicago, 1978), p. 4.

¹⁰Validity in Interpretation, p. 239.

- ¹¹Ibid., p. 5.
- ¹²William Empson, Seven Types of Ambiguity (New York, 1948), p. 1.
- ¹³Monroe C. Beardsley, The Possibility of Criticism (Detroit, 1970), p. 30.
- ¹⁴Ibid., p. 46.
- ¹⁵Ibid., p. 47.
- ¹⁶James R. Kreuzer, Elements of Poetry (New York, 1955), p. 203.
- ¹⁷Ferdinand de Saussure, Course in General Linguistics, as quoted in Frank Lentriccia, After the New Criticism (Chicago, 1980), p. 118.
- ¹⁸Wolfgang Iser, The Act of Reading (Baltimore, 1978), p. 34.
- ¹⁹Ibid., p. 169.
- ²⁰Serge Doubrovsky, The New Criticism in France (Chicago, 1973), p. 290.

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Evaluation of a Course in "Critical Analysis"
for High School Students

by
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Both amazing and distressing to me as an educator and lover of literature and language, is the way secondary classroom English programs have a tendency to distort the integrity of the discipline. The most notorious example is the teaching of school grammar--so called, traditional grammar--as a static, rule-laden, isolated subject. But grammar is not the only casualty of the public schools' "reinterpretation" of a language art. All aspects of the English/language arts curriculum suffer when approached as isolated, fragmented parts. When composition is viewed as a series of distinct skills apart from oral language, thought, and literature, when the study of literature is approached as a reading level problem, when language fluency is assessed through standardized, multiple choice tests, the sorry state of language arts programs in many schools should come as no shock. As frequently as school grammar differs from the potentially dynamic and fascinating study of language, so too, does "classroom criticism" differ from literary criticism. Certainly not all English/language arts classrooms and teachers perpetrate injustices on students and the study of language, but as long as many do--or some do--we must be concerned.

During the summer and fall of 1980, I worked with three different groups of English teachers. Twenty of the approximately seventy-five teachers were participants in a summer writing institute. These teachers, recommended and sponsored by their school districts, were enthusiastic, competent, experienced, and bright. However, only four of them had heard of I.A. Richards or the New Criticism.

The second group of teachers (35) were applying to have secondary English, journalism, and reading student teachers placed in their classrooms. Repeatedly, I was told of their frustrations in obtaining materials for a newly designed course in "critical analysis" proposed at the district level. The teachers claimed to be forbidden to include literature texts in their rooms during that semester "lest they teach literature instead of critical analysis." As a layperson friend exclaimed, "Without literature, what does one critically analyze!?"

The final blow to my morale was served as I polled a group of twenty-five student teachers about to begin their professional teaching careers. Twenty were soon to receive Bachelor's degrees in English from a major university. Five students were working toward teaching credentials to add to a B.A., M.A., or Ph.D. in English. Of the twenty-five, six admitted knowledge of Richards, New Criticism, or any other established literary critic or critical school or method. (It is hardly fair to include the Ph.D. in English literature in

these figures. Had he not responded knowledgeably, I may not have had the strength to report my dismal findings.)

At this point I would like to alert my readers to three important points:

1) In no way am I suggesting that my "survey" is generalizable to other teachers, schools, or districts. I am reporting informal observations, not results from controlled sampling. However, work with teachers in Ohio, California, and Texas, leads me to believe that teachers' knowledge of literary criticism, overall, is limited.

2) I do not intend my remarks to be taken as an indictment against teachers, district curriculum planners, university English departments, or teacher preparation programs, et. al. Laying blame is rarely a productive problem-solving technique. My purpose here is to describe a state of art.

3) I make no boasts of foolproof remedies to the problem. My comments are meant to be descriptive, not prescriptive; suggestive, not specific.

The National Writing Network has as one of its principles that "to teach writing, one must be a writer." But researchers have found that many English/composition teachers confine their writing to grocery lists. Such is also the case, I'm afraid, for many of the skills language arts teachers are asked to teach. How many books has the literature teacher read since college? How often does the language teacher formally speak before an audience? How well do most of us listen to the communication of others? When and how confidently do we analyze, evaluate and report on works we read? Yet we not only expect ourselves and our colleagues to be able to teach writing, reading, speaking, listening, and analyzing, but also we expect our students to readily grasp these sophisticated processes. With so many demands placed on the English teacher, it is no surprise that many have become "specialists" and that the language arts are fragmented and arranged into separate courses such as Grammar I, Composition III, Literature II, and Public Speaking IV. Until the language arts become re-integrated with the relationships among speaking, listening, reading, and writing clarified, emphasized, and actualized, literary criticism in the schools--critical analysis, if you prefer--will rarely echo the definition implied by scholars or encouraged by educators, textbook anthology editors, teacher's guides, or curriculum specialists. And, until we encourage English/language arts teachers to be active users of language in all of its forms, we must settle for teachers who are not doers, teachers who are followers not leaders, teachers who do not grasp the fundamental framework of the subject they teach.

Included in the final third of this discussion are excerpts from a course outline newly developed by a medium-sized urban school district to be used by teachers of critical analysis. This course description is not without its weaknesses, some of which I will discuss; however, it serves as a positive example of "classroom criticism." But, before continuing, I must argue that the best planned literature anthology, the most clearly written teacher's guide, the most provocative questions and assignments suggested by students' texts, and the most rational curriculum guides are no substitute for informed teachers. To teach the "tip of the iceberg," educators must be aware of the enormous "glacier" below the surface.

A major difficulty presently facing teachers is translating overall goals into specific objectives. Often, with the notion of accountability nudging curriculum planners, large, significant, but hard to measure goals are reduced to specific, mechanical, measurable tasks. For example, the contrast between the Overall Goal (Table I) and the fifth objective (Table II) is almost ludicrous. Furthermore, one would hope that junior and senior level, college bound, high school students would have mastered basic punctuation before enrolling in a critical analysis class. If not, punctuation skills, and all composition skills, could be integrated into daily classroom activities without assuming such importance that they require a goal equal to "recognizing the sociological functions of language" (Table II, #3, and Table II, #IV).

TABLE I

Course Description:	This course stresses the application of advanced usage skills in writing critical analyses of various types of literature. It familiarizes the students with the history of the English language and continues work on vocabulary development. Highly recommended for the college-bound student.
Overall Goal:	In this course, "the student learns how to read works of literature perceptively and how to express his responses to them. He studies the work itself; its use of literal and figurative language; its characters, actions, and themes. From his observation of <u>details</u> he moves to a consideration of <u>structure</u> and <u>meaning</u> and from there to <u>evaluation</u> . The students should then consider the possible universality of the work and its <u>relevance</u> to his experience and values, as well as any <u>special</u> relationship it may have to the times in which it was written..."

GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

1. Employ the various stages of the composing process: prewriting, writing, revision.
2. Make rhetorical choices based upon audience, purpose, aim, and form.
3. Make sophisticated language choices to convey the mood, tone, style, and emphasis appropriate to his purpose and audience.
4. Write a variety of informative and persuasive discourse, including explication of literary works, essays, and reports.
5. Use appropriate punctuation within and between all sentences.
6. Use the various forms of discourse, at a level of some sophistication and complexity, as a means of organizing ideas.
7. Describe the major features of the origins and development of the English language.
8. Recognize the sociological functions of language.
9. Analyze the presentation of ideas in written discourse including forms of logical reasoning, the common fallacies, the techniques of persuasive language, and the common propaganda devices.
10. Respond to the nuances of language including word connotation and denotation, figurative language, symbols, and images.
11. Recognize the relationship between sound devices (alliteration, rhythm, rhyme, onomatopoeia) and meaning in a literary selection.
12. Recognize that rhetorical devices are part of the meaning of a literary work.
13. Recognize the characteristics and uses of different types of narrators in literary works.
14. Understand character roles and analyze subtle emotional reactions and motives of characters.
15. Describe with appropriate terminology the major features of a literary work and their relationships.
16. Understand ways in which analysis can lead to greater understanding and enjoyment of literature.
17. Evaluate a literary work using both commonly accepted criteria and personally developed criteria.

TABLE III

Weeks	Topics
1 & 2	I. History of English language II. The vocabulary of linguistic analysis
3 & 4	III. Analysis of modern diction and style
5 & 6	IV. Review of composition skills
7 & 8	V. Introduction to critical analysis VI. Rhetorical analysis of fiction--point of view VII. Rhetorical analysis of fiction--overall structure
9 & 10	VIII. Rhetorical analysis of parts of structure IX. Meaning in style and rhetorical devices
11 & 12	X. Rhetorical analysis of poetry
13 & 14	XI. The language and concepts of logic XII. Analysis of nonfiction
15 & 16	XIII. Analysis of drama
17 & 18	XIV. Thematic analysis

TABLE IV
MATERIALS AND TEACHING AIDS

History of the English Language

District developed Curriculum Guide, The Literature of Anglo-Saxon England

Supplementary texts discussing the people, life, culture of this period

Reference books on the Old English language

Alexander's The Story of Our Language

Vocabulary lists of Anglo-Saxon derivatives

Maps of England, both modern and old

(Movie) History of the English Language (30 min., b & w, 30370)

(Movie) The Middle Ages: Culture of Medieval Europe (24 min., b & w M7216)

(Movie) The Middle Ages: Rise of Feudalism (20 min., b & w M5224)

Composition

District developed Individualized Packets for Composition

Adopted composition text

District developed Composition Packets (#47-53 The Theme of Analysis)

Literature

England in Literature (adopted text in district, grade 12)

Literature V (Holt, Rinehart supplementary text)

Literature VI (Holt, Rinehart supplementary text)

Selected short novel

Selected short stories

Selected drama (supplementing those in the text)

Selected essays

Selections from English literature may be used as examples for analysis in this course as well as for illustrations of the changing English language. DO NOT, however, begin a concentrated study of literature. The primary focus in this course is on language and on teaching critical analyses.

My second question concerning this particular curriculum guide is why so much time is spent on the history and development of the English language. This topic is fascinating and deserves a place in secondary school language programs. However, a course in critical analysis hardly seems the appropriate place to teach about the Romans, Celts, Jutes, and Vikings as suggested in the course outline. Furthermore, the study of the growth of language should not need to be condensed to a two-week tour of the history of invasions of early Europe.

Third, though not specifically stated, the course outline implies that the bulk of the materials to be analyzed come from English literature (see Table IV). Why not American literature?

Lastly, I must ask why the main thrust of the course, critical analysis, is not directly addressed until the seventh week of the course? Surely weeks 5 & 6 (Table III, #IV) could be woven into the fabric of the entire course as the need arose and the two weeks allotted to composition skills could be used to expand the study of literary analysis. If, in addition, the history of the language is removed from this course, then Topic V becomes Topic III and appears several weeks earlier in the semester. As can be seen from the list of materials (Table III), most of the resources (almost two-thirds) deal with the history of language and composition. One third includes literature selections. Nowhere does a text on traditional literary criticism appear. Goal #17 (Table II) states, "Evaluate a literary work using both commonly accepted criteria and personally developed criteria?" What commonly accepted criteria? Whose commonly accepted criteria? Where are students expected to learn about standard practices of critical analysis if teachers are neither prepared before embarking on their careers nor provided sources by district curriculum specialists?

But district-level personnel are no more at fault for the chasm between literary criticism and "classroom criticism" than is anyone else. They, too, are victims of the precedent of "specialization" and "reinterpretation" of English/language arts. They, too, are struggling with accountability, goals and objectives. They, too, feel uncomfortable with the topic of critical analysis, often because it can be subjective and difficult to quantify.

To return to my original refrain: the solution lies in the reintegration of the language arts. When students--and teachers--are actively engaging in the processes of speaking, listening, reading, and writing rather than passively and separately learning about speaking, listening, reading, and writing, then perhaps classroom curricula will more closely reflect the scholars' perspectives on language. Furthermore, we need professional educators committed to learning and knowing about a topic before teaching it. To be "two pages ahead of the class" is not a sufficient teaching technique. When these two conditions are satisfied, perhaps we will eliminate the differences between "school grammar" and the study of language patterns, "composition skills" and the processes of composing, and "classroom criticism" and literary criticism.

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Needed: A Morphology of Literary Criticism
For the Classroom Teacher

by
C. Lamar Thompson

At the beginning of the "Polemical Introduction" to the Anatomy of Criticism, Northrop Frye indicates the nature of his work as well as its subject and aim:

This book consists of "essays," in the word's original sense of a trial or incomplete attempt, on the possibility of a synoptic view of the scope, theory, principles, and techniques of literary criticism. The primary aim of the book is to give my reasons for believing in such a synoptic view; its secondary aim is to provide a tentative version of it which will make enough sense to convince my readers that a view, of the kind that I outline, is attainable.¹

That Anatomy of Criticism, then, does not represent a completed theory or a closed system but an "interconnected group of suggestions which," Frye hopes, "will be of some practical use to critics and students of literature."² Further, Frye sees his work as opening the way for a specific development in literary criticism:

What is here offered is pure critical theory, and the omission of all specific criticism, even, in three of the four essays, of quotation, is deliberate. The present book seems to me, so far as I can judge at present, to need a complementary volume concerned with practical criticism, a sort of morphology of literary criticism.³

There are two points which might be emphasized here. One is that Frye's choice of the word "morphology" (a choice underscored by the "anatomy" of the title) indicates the need for objective, systematic method in dealing with such a study. Frye, in fact, views literary criticism as "an examination of literature in terms of a conceptual framework derivable from an inductive survey of the literary field,"⁴ a view which places the discipline of poetics in analogy to that of biology:

A theory of criticism whose principles apply to the whole of literature and account for every valid type of critical procedure is what I think Aristotle meant by poetics. Aristotle seems to me to approach poetry as a biologist would approach a system of organisms, picking out its genera and species, formulating the broad laws of literary experience, and in short writing as though he believed that there is a

totally intelligible structure of knowledge attainable about poetry which is not poetry itself, or the experience of it, but poetics.⁵

The second point is that what he says about critics and criticism applies equally to the work of the teacher of literature; and, in fact, for Frye, the terms critic and teacher coalesce: "The problems of literary criticism and literary education are inseparable."⁶

Thus, Frye's work indicates the need to utilize a logical and basically scientific approach in order to derive a guide for teaching literature based on the critical principles of the Anatomy of Criticism. At the center of the need for such a guide rests a particular critical problem articulated by Frye:

There is as yet no way of distinguishing what is genuine criticism, and therefore progresses toward making the whole of literature intelligible, from what belongs only to the history of taste, and therefore follows the vacillations of fashionable taste.⁷

That is, there seems to be no inclusive structure that describes the principles by which literature works and avoids externally derived critical attitudes (i.e., attitudes derived from the opinions of the critic-teacher.) Such a structure would place the work itself at the center of the system rather than the philosophy of the teacher, no matter how closely connected or pertinent such a philosophy is to the subject being discussed.

This distinction can perhaps be clarified by an example suggested by Frye. The character Ophelia is sometimes said to be mistreated by Hamlet. However, such a judgment depends on the critic's opinion of what a woman in Ophelia's position deserves and can be countered by the equally subjective assertion that Ophelia merited Hamlet's rejection because she betrayed him. John Ruskin in Munerva Pulveris attempts to talk about Ophelia in a different way:

Ophelia, "serviceableness," the true, lost wife of Hamlet, is marked as having a Greek name by that of her brother Laertes; and its signification is once exquisitely alluded to in that brother's last word of her, where her gentle preciousness is opposed to the usefulness of the churlish clergy: --"A ministering angel shall my sister be, when thou liest howling."⁸

This passage exemplifies, in Frye's opinion, a proper critical approach:

Now whether Ruskin is right or wrong, he is attempting genuine criticism. He is trying to interpret Shakespeare in terms of a conceptual framework which belongs to the critic alone, and yet relates itself to the play alone.⁹

Ruskin's method, the one sanctioned by Frye, is that of description and coordination: he describes Ophelia by giving a Greek derivation of her name and coordinates this information with something another character says. What

he avoids is fostering onto the play some concept--for example, that Ophelia deserves or does not deserve her fate--grounded in his own opinion rather than in the words of the play. Though his critical statement might be right or wrong (the Greek derivation may be incorrect), his method is founded on that data provided by Shakespeare.

The teaching guide proposed here should be designed specifically to meet the needs of the high school English teacher who, though perhaps knowledgeable about the literature he teaches, is rarely found to have systematic training as a critic.¹⁰ The most he can have hoped for as an undergraduate is a semester course providing a historical survey of critical practice and an English methods course which might have nothing to do with literary criticism. Certainly literary study in the classroom is built on critical principles since presumably English teachers are conversant with English literature; but there would seem to be no comprehensive, clearly articulated statement clarifying the nature of these principles. The significance of a teaching guide as proposed would cope with this problem by providing high school English teachers with the means of incorporating clarified principles of literary criticism into their methods of teaching.

NOTES

¹Northrop Frye, Anatomy of Criticism (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1971), p. 3.

²Ibid.

³Ibid., vii.

⁴Ibid., p. 7.

⁵Ibid., p. 14.

⁶Northrop Frye, The Well-Tempered Critic, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1963), p. 15.

⁷Frye, Anatomy of Criticism, p. 9.

⁸Ibid.

⁹Ibid.

¹⁰This lack in the preparation of English teachers is emphasized in the report of the Illinois Statewide Curriculum Study Center on the Preparation of Secondary School English Teachers. See English Education, Spring, 1970.

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**Literary Structuralism:
An Introductory Explanation and Some Educational Implications**

by
Gordon Peterson

New Criticism has been the most influential literary critical theory since the 1930s and, although it has been frequently criticized, its assumptions about the integrity of the text and its methodology (explication) are dominant in most literary circles. However, during the 1970s the ideas associated with Structuralism have gained prestige, and a growing number of individuals have found these ideas helpful in the teaching of literature. The purpose of this article is to define New Criticism and Structuralism very briefly, to summarize the ideas of some of the most important literary structuralists, and to give some educational implications of these ideas.

New Criticism

Before we discuss the ideas of some literary structuralists, a brief summary of the ideas associated with New Criticism is necessary. In a narrow sense the term New Criticism is derived from John Crowe Ransom's *THE NEW CRITICISM* (1941) and it applies to the works of such critics as Ransom, Allen Tate, and Robert Penn Warren. In a broader sense the term applies to the twentieth century critics who emphasize close verbal analysis. New Criticism flourished in England and America in the 1930s and 1940s to the extent that by the mid 1950s it had become the established orthodoxy.

New Criticism was a conservative reaction to much of the liberal early twentieth century criticism (the "older" criticism) which emphasized biographical, historical, political, psychological, ethical, and sociological aspects that either ignored or obscured the study of a literary selection in its own terms. New Criticism advocates that a literary selection has its own excuse for existence and it stresses the organic relationship of the different parts, the evocative power of words, and close analysis of such stylistic aspects as simile and metaphor. Objective analysis of the text is the most appropriate method of studying literature. A work of literature should be regarded as autonomous and so should not be judged by reference to considerations beyond itself.

Structuralism

Structuralism is fundamentally a way of thinking about the world, and it emphasizes the perception and description of basic structures. As a developing concern of modern thinkers, it is the result of a historic shift in the perception of reality which crystallized in the early twentieth century, particularly in the physical sciences and later in the social sciences and humanities. Structuralism's "new" perception involves the realization

that, despite appearances to the contrary, the world does not consist of independently existing objects whose features can be perceived clearly. In fact, every person's method of perceiving contains an inherent bias which affects what is perceived to a significant degree, and a wholly objective perception of individual entities is not possible. Accordingly, the relationships between observer and observed achieves a kind of primacy and, in fact, becomes the ultimate stuff of reality. The true nature of things lies not in the things themselves, but in the relationships which we construct and then perceive. This concept, that the world is made up of relationships rather than things, constitutes the basic principle of the way of thinking which has been labeled Structuralism.

Literary Structuralists

Viktor Shklovsky

The most important early twentieth century literary movement that directly had impact on literary structuralism is what is called Russian Formalism. This school of literary criticism was dominant in Russia during the 1920s, it was suppressed for political reasons in the 1930s, it began to receive attention from European scholars during the late 1960s, and it began to influence American scholars in the 1970s. Probably the most influential and widely known proponent of this theory is Viktor Shklovsky.

Shklovsky argues that literature is autonomous, a permanent, self-determining, and continuous human activity which warrants nothing less than examination in and of itself on its own terms. Literary criticism should be seen as a distinct and unified intellectual activity, with its proper area of operations clearly and unequivocally defined. The unique subject of literature is the distinguishing structural features found within the work itself.

Defamiliarization is one of Shklovsky's most important concepts and perhaps his most important contribution. The essential function of literature is to counteract the process of habituation encouraged by routine everyday modes of perception where we cease to "see" and become anaesthetized to distinctive features. The aim of literature is to defamiliarize that with which we are overly familiar, to "creatively denorm" the usual, and so to inculcate a childlike innocence of perspective. The writer thus aims to disrupt "stock responses" and to generate a heightened awareness of our ordinary perception of "reality", so that we end up seeing the world instead of numbly recognizing it.

Literary discourse, according to Shklovsky, is fundamentally different from other discourse. The aim of literature is not the practical transmission of information that lies beyond itself, but its purpose is to emphasize the "medium" over and above the "message" it contains. Words in literature have the status not simply of vehicles for thoughts but of objects in their own right.

Shklovsky also states that the "meaning" habitually carried by words can never be fully separated from the words themselves because no word has one "simple" meaning. The "meaning" of A is not simply A1 or A2 or A3, for A has

a larger capacity to derive meaning from its context. In literature, a word is not separate from its meaning, so much as there are a multiple of meanings. Literary use of a word makes ambiguity a notable feature of its performance, and it is this that alters its structural role from that of a signifier to that of signified.

The focus in narratives, for Shklovsky, is on plot (storytelling), and other literary aspects are derived from or created by the plot.

Vladimir I. Propp

Propp makes an important contribution by developing a taxonomy of folk tales that is especially valuable because the folk tale is an important prototype of all literature. After making an exhaustive analysis of a large number of folk tales, he arrives at the following basic principles:

1. In spite of a large number of characters, the number of functions is small, the functions of characters are independent of how and by whom they are fulfilled, and they constitute the fundamental component of a tale.
2. There are a limited number of "spheres of action" corresponding to their "respective performers" as follows: the hero, the villain, the helper, the sought-for-person.
3. All folk tales are of one type in regard to their structure. In a specific folk tale (narrative) one character may be involved in several spheres of action, and several characters may be involved in the same sphere of action, but the important thing to notice is that the number of spheres of action occurring is finite: we are dealing with discernable structures which have implications for all narratives.

Tzvetan Todorov

The main contribution to literary structuralism by Todorov is the idea there exists, at a deep level, a "grammar" of narrative form from which individual narratives ultimately derive their specific form (here Todorov expands the ideas of Propp). There exists a "universal grammar" which underlies all languages, and even all signifying systems. Todorov identifies three dimensions of "grammar" (1. the syntactical, or the combinations of various structural units; 2. the semantic, or content; and 3. the verbal, or the manipulations of the particular words and phrases), but he is basically concerned with syntax. Todorov suggests the following "grammar" of narrative:

1. sequences (a related string of propositions capable of constituting a complete and independent story) can be seen as "paragraphs";
2. propositions (the basic element of syntax; they consist of "irreducible" actions which act as the fundamental units of narrative and these usually appear as a series of related propositions) can be seen as "sentences";

3. characters can be said to function as "nouns";
4. the attributes of characters as "adjectives";
5. and the actions of characters can be seen as "verbs".

Roland Barthes

According to Roland Barthes, the French critic who is probably the most important literary structuralist, literature is a language system, its ultimate being resides not in its content but in its formal structure, and its value is not in its relation to the concrete but in its successful internal development. Like the New Critics, Barthes is chiefly concerned with that which is distinctly literary (language) and he is opposed to the reduction of literary works to environmental facts (biographical, historical, political, religious, sociological, psychological, or ideological aspects). However, unlike the New Critics, he thinks objectivity is self-deception and he encourages individual interpretations. Differences in interpretation are caused by words having different meanings to different individuals and he encourages individual interpretations because there should be ongoing reassessments instead of assuming the meaning has already been firmly established.

Probably his greatest contributions are his ideas about the reading act, his statement about codes, and his distinction between validity and truth. Barthes argues that in literature the reader should have a role of producer and not just consumer. Literature should invite the reader to "join in," to offer the joys of cooperation, and to be aware of the inter-relationship of writing and reading. He makes several distinctions between "readerly" texts and "writerly" texts. Where "readerly" texts are static and perpetuate an "established" view of reality and an "established" scheme of values frozen in time, "writerly" texts require reading to look at the language itself, and not through a preordained "real" world. Where "readerly" texts presuppose and depend upon the presumption of objectivity and innocence, and with them the unquestioned relationship between signifier and signified that those presumptions reinforce, "writerly" texts presume nothing, admit no easy passage from signifier to signified, and are open to the "play" of the codes. In "readerly" texts the signifiers march; in "writerly" texts they dance. In "readerly" texts the language and ideas reflect the "comfortable" culture, where in "writerly" texts the practice of reading discomforts, imposes a state of loss, and unsettles the readers' historical, cultural, psychological assumptions, and brings a crisis.

Barthes makes an important contribution by recognizing five master codes in a text, and these codes include both the syntagmatic and the semantic aspects of the text (the way its parts are related to one another and the way the parts are related to the outside world). The five codes are as follows:

1. The code of actions. This is the data of the narrative, that which happens, such as the "storm" sequence.
2. The code of puzzles. This is the storytelling code and considers the means by which the narrative raises problems, creates suspense, and provides a resolution.

3. The cultural code. Under this heading Barthes groups the whole accepted system of knowledge and values invoked by a text. These appear as nuggets of proverbial wisdom and the various stereotypes of understanding which constitute the established and authoritative cultural "reality".
4. The connotative code. This is a code of connotations or "flickers of implied meaning" generated by certain signifiers. An example is midnight suggests evil.
5. The symbolic code. This is the basic idea, or ideas, of a selection. Codes 4 and 5 are very similar, but the difference is that connotative code contains the specifics which develop the theme whereas the symbolic code is more the general abstract theme.

Regarding validity and truth, Barthes believes that literary criticism is language about language and it is not about the world or exterior reality. The purpose of criticism is not to discover "truths" but only to find "validities." Language, in itself, is neither true nor false, it is either valid or not valid in the sense of presenting a coherent and internally consistent system of signs (words). The critic does not have complete freedom to make any statement, but good criticism results in a coherent statement based on the internal qualities of a literary work.

Implications

Previously I have tried to summarize the most important ideas relevant to literary structuralism. Now I would like to suggest some appropriate new directions for the teaching of literature.

Most of the arguments directed against New Criticism have in varying degrees been a frontal assault on the cardinal New Critical belief that literary discussion should severely limit itself to an objective analysis of the "words on the page." More specifically, it seems the literary structuralists are making two arguments against New Criticism:

1. The "innocent" reader (a person without prejudice or ideology) cannot and/or does not exist: it is not possible simply to objectively confront the "words on the page." A wide range of mediating economic, aesthetic, political, philosophical, psychological, religious, and social ideas intervene between the text and the reader, and these ideas ultimately shape reader response.
2. There exists no "objective" text and no pre-ordained "content" stored within it. Literature is not a medium for a pre-packed "message": rather, medium and message are one, or, perhaps more accurately, the medium dominates. Of course New Criticism acknowledges this situation to a considerable degree, but its insistence on the sanctity of the text proves finally at odds with it.

What then does literary structuralism, the "new" New Criticism, offer then as a replacement for the old and, at least partially, discredited New Criticism?

The key concept is obviously that of "poetics": a concern not with content, but with the way the content is formulated. This rests on an analogy made with one of the fundamental developments of modern linguistics: the notion that the central task of linguistic investigation is not, ultimately, to describe a corpus of data, but to account for facts about language by constructing a formal representation of what is involved in language. Applied to literature, this model suggests that a text should be seen in relation to other works. Just as linguistics attempts to account for an abstract system which generates the concrete event, so literary criticism should attempt to account for a "poetics" of reading and writing conceived as an abstract system of conventions by which a selection is generated. What is needed is a concept of literary "competence" capable of generating all the elements that we collectively recognize as literature. Chief among the principles that can be generated that permit us to make sense of literature are:

1. The principle of significance, which requires a selection to express a significant attitude about some universal human condition.
2. The principle of unity, which requires the arrangements of entities into a wholeness.
3. The principle of self-regulation, which requires that a selection make no appeal beyond itself to validate itself (a selection has its own internal and self-sufficient rules).
4. The principle of transformation, which requires the selection to be capable of being transformed into a wide variety of new statements while retaining the essentials of the original.

Following are some illustrative specific questions reflecting basic literary structuralist ideas:

1. Compare this story with the one we read yesterday and explain how they are similar and different.
2. Evaluate the extent to which the plot is interrelated?
3. Analyze and evaluate the author's style.
4. To what extent does the author give adequate justification for the change in the main character?
5. Evaluate the believability of this story based on what the author wrote.
6. To what extent does this selection deal with a significant aspect of the human condition?
7. To what extent does this selection help us see a familiar object (or event) in a new and fresh way? How does the author achieve

this effect?

8. This sentence contains a polysemous word (a word which has more than one meaning, such as "bat" (a baseball bat or the mammal)). Give at least two different meanings to the word. Which meaning did the author mean? How do you know? Why did you have to read the entire sentence (paragraph or story) to get the author's meaning?
9. How did the theme, characterization, and setting evolve from the plot?
10. Give the name of the character(s) that filled each of the following roles: hero, villain, helper, sought-for-person. Explain your choice.

Following are activities that are NOT consistent with the ideas of literary structuralism (the structuralist position is in brackets):

1. Using the ideas in a selection to accomplish nationalistic or moralistic purposes, such as teaching children respect for the democratic way of life or teaching children to be obedient. (For structuralism, emphasis is on form, not content.)
2. Using the facts or concepts in a selection to teach children something, such as the meaning of evolution or why people in the Far East eat more rice than people in America. (Emphasis should be on the form or structure and not on content).
3. Just discussing one story. (The structures of stories should be compared).
4. Discussing specific facts. (The structures should be discussed).
5. Evaluation based on personal experiences. (In structuralism, evaluation is based primarily on what the author presented).

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Barthes and the Pleasure of Reading

by
Walter Sondey

Some recent works of criticism offer new perspectives and challenges for those who teach the appreciation and interpretation of literature. The works of the late French critic Roland Barthes are especially valuable in this respect. In particular, it will be illuminating to examine some facets of Barthes critical essay S/Z, an analysis of Balzac's short story, Sarrazine.

It will be useful to sketch briefly the context of Barthes critical perspective in S/Z. Underlying Barthes semiological (the theory of signification) method are some basic distinctions established by the founder of semiology; the linguist Ferdinand de Saussure. His distinction between language, the system of laws and conventions that determine the meaningful production of language, and parole, the actual utterance in which we find meaning, are central to Barthes' enterprise. Barthes applies much the same approach, at a higher level, by distinguishing the rules and conventions of literary production, such as narrative, from the meaning that is made available by that production. Interesting comparisons may also be made between Barthes' work and that of Freud and of Claude Levi-Strauss, who is also heavily influenced by Saussure.

Without plunging into the many difficult and tentative thoughts occasioned by Barthes' semiological perspective, it will still be possible to deal with some of the basic questions his work raises. The foremost of these question concerns the very basis for the sharing of literature as a meaningful experience. It is on this point that Barthes provides some basic clarifications which will no doubt contribute to a fuller understanding of the grounds upon which literature is shared as well as furthering the appreciation of literature for itself.

Most simply, the critical investigations of S/Z are aimed toward the revelation of means and their ends. The means, in this case, are words produced within language's system of syntax and conventions such as those of narrative or rhyme. This system of words constitutes the basic signifiers or means of literature. What, then, constitutes a literary end? Barthes has two answers for this question. First, we must examine what he claims to have traditionally understood as the end of literature.

Barthes makes an important distinction between practice or production and what is produced. In what Barthes calls the "readerly" text the end of reading is to produce a well circumscribed meaning in the reader's mind. This meaning is noted as that which is signified by the text. The signified may be understood, at the general level of this paper, as simply referring to a schema of values or ideals for and of human activity which give a text's signifiers their orientation of polarization. The signified may be viewed

as the product of the "readerly" text's production. The reader in this instance, Barthes would insist, is not so much producing a text as he or she is being produced by it! For example, as a reading of Macbeth progresses and concludes the overall meaning or signified becomes apparent. Macbeth reads into us the values of a transcendent order (the chain of being) and the tragic horror of its order transgressed. The figure of Macbeth ruptures the transcendent model or signified order of the play (and cosmos) thus making the reading of the play a ritual of its re-instatement. In this way the reader is brought to a well defined end of reading, and, as a reader--as an incarnation of language--becomes the means to that end.

In this type of reading the basis for sharing literary experience may be grounded in the values of the signified produced in the reader's mind. Reading thus becomes a referendum. The sharing of literature in this case, inasmuch as sharing means the concentration on a common field of experience (the text) by two or more people, may be focused on the examination of the validity of the text's signified and the expression of our feelings toward it. Barthes, however, is characteristically concerned with the practice or means of producing literature and his point of view leads away from the contemplation of the signified towards an explication of the way in which it is made. This view leads him, as will be shown later, to a redefinition of reading.

Barthes stresses the fact that we share reading, and therefore literature, as producers or workers. He notes that it is not only at the level of the finished product or signified that we may share our literary experience. As he points out in S/Z, the system of language which is used to produce signifiers is in itself a valid focus for discussion. With Macbeth, for instance, one could discuss the convention of dramatic form, temporal sequence or the connotative relation of signifiers such as those of lightness and darkness which contribute to the constitution of the signified. All of these would help reveal how we produce our reading and "work" the text. In this manner Barthes distinguishes two points of entrance to the sharing of literature: its practice or production, and its products or signifiers. This now leads to an examination of Barthes' redefinition of reading and some reflections on the consequences this redefinition may have for sharing literature.

Opposed to what is noted as the "readerly" text is the "writerly" text. It is Barthes' contention that the practice of reading this text is unlike that used with the "readerly." The reader experiences the "writerly" in the text which does not circumscribe its signifiers, or polarize them by centering their potential on a signified. The "writerly" has no determinate signified for the signifiers to refer to (for example, no signified cosmos as there is "behind" Macbeth) and is therefore dependent upon the reader to produce the significance of the text without a standard of appeal. In this case, the reader is no longer read by the text but instead becomes its producer or writer. The readers must determine the text's interest and significance from themselves since the text itself has become mute on this point.

The "writerly" text rejects the signified and thus eliminates it as a grounds for sharing literature. What, then, is left? Having eliminated the signified as a common field of concentration, the reader's attention is instead concentrated upon the act of reading itself. Reading is about reading. This is the level at which the "writerly" is shared, for to share this text

it is necessary to concentrate on the "play" of language and linguistic systems themselves rather than on any message they might deliver. The "writerly" directs the reader's attention to his or her own activity and the means by which that activity is directed; the syntax and conventions of language.

Much of Gertrude Stein's work, for example, may be called "writerly." Texts such as her's will often frustrate those who read them for their "point" or "message" since a consistent polarization of meaning, constituting a signified somehow lying "behind" the text, is not present. The signifiers in these texts supposedly have no absolute end or point from which to assign meaning and thus each reader becomes that point. The field of concentration is shifted from creating a product (signified) through the reading toward recognizing reading itself as an act of production, toward an appraisal of means as a never completed, indeterminate and paradoxical end in itself.

The "writerly" may be objectionable to many readers. For many it may represent the turning away from the inquiry into and examination of values for and of daily life which have most often been the concern of "high style" literature. Without the force of the signified present in the reading of the text, readers searching for such meaning are left with two alternatives; one being to give up the search for transcendent values in the text and the other being the discussion of their absence. Fortunately, this is not a question of either/or in regard to the "readerly" and "writerly" while also finding enjoyment in reflecting upon the "play" of values present in the "readerly."

Thus far the concentration has been on the meaning or signified produced by reading the text. Having established Barthes' overall views on this point it will be useful to examine more closely his analysis of the means of literary production. Barthes analyzes these means by breaking them down into five codes.

The hermeneutic code defines the principles of narration. Narrative is shown to be based on the progressive elaboration and resolution of certain questions or enigmas. For example, the title of Balzac's novella Sarrazine raises the first hermeneutic question of that text: who is Sarrazine? The very title invites us to read on and resolve that question in order to be presented with further questions. The hermeneutic code of narration, then, is defined as the succession of questions and answers through time.

The symbolic code gives us the general configuration of meaningful oppositions or tensions in the text. In Macbeth, for example, these configurations are composed of male and female, light and darkness, order and disorder, natural and unnatural.

The semic code stands in a qualifying relationship to the elements of the symbolic code. The semes inform us about the human qualities and emotional complexes attaching to these elements and figures. In addition, semes also qualify the actions represented in the course of narrative. Some of the semes noted in Barthes' analysis, S/Z, are femininity, anger, stubbornness, etc.

As noted above, the semes often refer to actions represented in the narrative. These actions themselves constitute a code noted as the proairetic or action code. The actions identified by this code may be running, smoking, opening a door, etc.

The last code to be noted is the reference code. This code refers to the text's allusions to its own literary system and the other meaningful cultural systems which constitute the historical context of its production. The allusions made to religion and the nature of man in Defoe's Robinson Crusoe, for example would indicate to us its historic context. Such information places the text within a larger network of meaning.

The occurrence of these codes in the text are noted in units called lexies. Each lexie may have roughly one to five or six references to the various codes. These lexies are arbitrary and may break a sentence at mid-point. Their length is dictated by the number of code references accumulated and the need to comment upon them.

To make the meaning and use of these terms and method plain I will apply them to the first paragraph of Poe's short story, The Tell-Tale Heart. This should serve to illustrate the important ways in which Barthes' approach enlarges and creates in many instances the dimensions of our reading and sharing of literature.

The Tell-Tale Heart

(Herm.: What tale is to be told and in whose heart is it?)

"True! - nervous - very, very dreadfully nervous...."

(Herm.: What is true? Answer: the nervous state.

Seme.: agitation,

"...I had been and am; but why will you say that I am mad?"

(Herm.: Why will we think the narrator mad?

Answer: delayed.

Sym.: the sane and the mad.)

"The disease had sharpened my senses - not destroyed - not dulled them."

(Herm.: What is the disease? Answer: delayed.

Sym.: health and disease. Contained within this is a paradox: disease or decay sharpens perception.)

"Above all was the sense of hearing acute. I heard all things in heaven and in the earth. I heard many things in hell."

(Ref.: rhetoric: The literary language of the nineteenth century is indicated by the displacement of "was."

Sym.: An ideal heaven opposed to earthly existence and hell as either a third term or a metonymical extension of life on earth; the text is significantly ambivalent.)

"How, then, am I mad? Hearken! and observe how healthily - how calmly I can tell you the whole story."

(Herm.: again, is the narrator mad?

Ref.: rhetoric: The literary language of the nineteenth century is indicated by the use of "Hearken!"

Sym.: health and disease.

Seme.: agitation: paradoxically, the narrative voice invokes calmness.)

As will be noted, the action code fails to appear in this first paragraph. It is only later in the story that actions are represented in passages such as this: "...I turned the latch of his door and opened it..." All of the other codes, however, are well represented and this brief example should illustrate them fairly well.

The great advantage of this approach, even when used on parts of a text, is that it establishes, by means of its terminology, the grounds for a common concentration on the text. By using Barthes' approach a more specific and intense reading is made possible. S/Z shows us how the laws of literary production may be revealed; at the same time it indicates how the values signified by the text may be made all the more outstanding and open to discussion. This sharpening of our skills and perceptions as readers is the success of Barthes' work.

Ohio University

When Theories Bind: A Contrast of Modes

by
Lee Burrell

A group of German academics who may loosely be referred to as the Frankfurt School were approximate contemporaries of the school of literary criticism known as the New Critics. The two groups make an interesting comparison and raise questions about the effect of theory on society through teaching or research.

Most readers of this report have probably been made familiar with the New Critics; they are less likely to know of the Frankfurt School. Though the original name of the school was the Institut für Sozialforschung, it was not at all like our contemporary notion of sociology or research of a sociological nature, as the doctoral dissertations of various members of the group indicate. Theodor Adorno was a student of music; he studied under Schönberg and Alban Berg, composer of the opera Wozzeck; his dissertation was on the sociology of music. Herbert Marcuse wrote a dissertation on the German kunstlerroman (novels in which the artists played the leading role, according to Martin Jay, whose book The Dialectical Imagination I have used as a source for this brief summary of the Frankfurt School). Other members of the school included Leo Lowenthal, who wrote a dissertation on the sociology of literature.

The Frankfurt School began its formal existence in 1923, but left Germany in 1933, moved to New York in quarters offered at Columbia University in 1934, and returned to Frankfurt in 1949, though several of its members--Herbert Marcuse, for example--remained permanently in the United States. Many of the publications of the school after moving to the United States were in German, and for this and other reasons the school remained, Martin Jay observed, outside the mainstream of academic life in the United States.

Nevertheless, the school and a number of others who had more or less peripheral relationships to it, suggest a model for the study of an art form that differed considerably from the practice of English departments in the United States.

The Frankfurt School was interested in the interactions of art and the culture that gave birth to the art. They wished to use empirical and analytic methods of describing those relationships between art and almost every aspect of society, including politics and economics as well as the sociological and psychological aspects. All illustration of this effort to show such relationships is the book by Walter Kracauer, From Caligari's Cabinet to Hitler; though Kracauer was not directly or immediately a member of the Frankfurt School, it was this kind of work that the Frankfurt School was interested in and attempted to stimulate.

Other applications of the Frankfurt School approach may be seen in such of its publications as Anti-Semitism in American Labor, The Authoritarian Personality, in Walter Benjamin's The Origins of German Tragedy, in the several titles of Erich Fromm, in the many publications of Max Horkheimer, the several titles of Leo Lowenthal, including Literature, Popular Culture and Society, work on the Radio Research Project by Paul Lazarfeld, who with Theodor Adorno and others studied radio music in several countries and analyzed the programs from the standpoint of an effort to understand mass culture and the uses it made of music. Bruno Bettelheim was not a member of the school in Europe; he did work with one of the major projects in the United States: The Studies in Prejudice. He wrote, with Morris Janowitz, the report entitled Dynamics of Prejudice: A Psychological and Sociological Study of Veterans. Bettelheim's book The Uses of Enchantment (an analysis of children's responses to fairy tales) may be a clearer illustration to members of English departments of the Frankfurt School approach. It should be clear, incidentally, that the Frankfurt School has no monopoly on this approach, and various persons not connected with the school may also illustrate the critical-empirical dialectic that is most central to the work of the Frankfurt School.

Two important characteristics that immediately emerge from this discussion are the refusal of the Frankfurt School to specialize in one so-called discipline and the development of the critical method. This method had empirical elements; members of the school were interested in discovering the actualities of the society under examination. For this reason, they were more likely to ask about the relationship between the objet d'art and its social milieu than to concentrate their attention on the art object itself, as to considerable degree the New Critics tended to do. These two interests--a broad concern with the arts and an empirical-analytic approach to the arts in their milieu--seem significantly different from those of the New Criticism.

An illustration of the refusal of English departments to pay attention to the relationship between literature and its milieu is the experience that I had twice at the MLA annual convention. It was possible to set up a discussion group on a selected topic by having ten colleagues sign a petition supporting that topic. Twice I proposed a discussion of literary censorship. I had the same experience each time. Most of the persons who came to the discussion group were from fields other than English. Each time two or three graduate students in English stopped in briefly to say that they had considered doing a graduate paper, a master's or doctoral dissertation on some aspect of censorship, but had been turned down by their English departments on the ground that such a subject was not really a literary subject.

In contrast to the reports of English graduate students was the student from a drama department, who reported a doctoral dissertation on censorship of the drama in Ireland, or students from foreign language departments who reported such dissertation topics as the censorship of drama in Spain between 1880 and 1930. Students in English education have done doctoral dissertations in censorship, including Nyla Ahrens whose dissertation was done in education at Teachers College, Columbia, or Rozanne Knudson whose dissertation was done in education at Stanford. I have had considerable correspondence from students in other disciplines, such as political science, history, and communications, concerning their dissertations in censorship. But rarely will English departments approve a graduate paper in censorship.

Cause and effect relationships are extremely difficult to demonstrate between literary criticism and teaching; yet some observations on the possible deleterious effects of New Criticism on teaching may be hazarded. If the art object has definite and objective reality and should be examined in and of itself, as seemed to be the implication of the New Critics' approach, then the characteristic method that was employed was the lecture method, and to a very great degree the purpose of a given class assignment was to understand the received opinion about the literary work and to be able to describe that received opinion. Great and eminent exceptions to this principle are surely known to all the readers of this essay, but my observation of the practice in many universities and high schools has been that the lecture method, with a concomitant desire to explain the presumed correct interpretation of the literary work, has all too often been the prevailing mode of instruction.

Whether that description is accurate or not, I have long been impressed with the inability of many undergraduate English students to have an operative knowledge of such terms as character, setting, plot, theme, symbol, allegory, as well as a failure to understand the necessity of an organic or holistic interpretation of literary or other works of art. Whether a lecture method based on the notion of the objective nature and definitive interpretations of literary works accounts for these widespread failures, cannot be demonstrated with certainty. The readers of this essay may discover for themselves by careful attention to the responses of their students whether my observations about the high rate of inability of students in English classes to use the concepts listed above are accurate or not.

To make such an examination will require some attention to a carefully worked out empirical method, and it is my further observation that ability to make empirical investigations of the response of the audience to a literary work has not been a common feature of English department literary research, though Robert Carlsen, Alan Purves and others have demonstrated the possibilities.

Another possible result of the adoption by English departments of the New Criticism has been the enhancement of the long term tendency toward a constriction of the declared subject matter. Rhetoric as an oral art was spun off in the early part of this century, to the loss of efficiency in instruction. The discoveries of the linguists came primarily out of sociology, and have regularly been resisted by English departments. Folklore has only slightly been a part of the English curriculum, though such eminent literary scholars as Albert Guérard in his book A Preface To World Literature have made crystal clear the essential role of folklore in language and literature. This increasing constriction of its subject matter has certainly played no small part in the diminishing role of the English department and the increasing restriction of English to a certain kind of preciousness on the one hand and an emphasis on a utilitarian approach to teaching composition and grammar on the other.

I have in this paper no doubt tilted at an enormous number of windmills. I have called attention to an example of an effective mode of organization of intellectual effort that is nondepartmental, that attempts to complement the theoretical approach of the New Critics with an effort to obtain empirical data concerning the response of the audience, and attempts to understand the

role of the various arts in relationship to the politics, economics, and other aspects of culture. Perhaps this essay may encourage those members of the English department who wish to move away from the present choice between preciosity and utilitarianism. It may also be that experiments in a mode parallel to that of the Frankfurt School could produce in our students a better ability to make operative the literary concepts cited above.

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I have made little effort to classify "schools" of theory here since this is adequately done in several of the suggested readings, particularly in Wellek and Warren and also in Culler, Booth, Graff, Lentriccia and Krieger. Two areas, however, have been neglected. For a bibliographical guide to contemporary psychoanalytic literary theory the reader should consult the last chapter of Norman Holland's Poems in Persons (New York: Norton, 1973); for Marxist theory, valuable sources are Frederick Jameson, Marxism and Form: Twentieth Century Dialectical Theories of Literature (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1971) and Terry Eagleton, Criticism and Ideology: A Study in Marxist Literary Theory (London: Verso Editions, 1978).

Ray Fitch

CONTINUING COLUMN:
RESEARCH IN THE TEACHING OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE ARTS

"Research in Composition in the 1980's Worth Noting"

by
David Bergdahl

At first a new research field like composition mystifies. Everyone seems to be working independently. Then, gradually, one notices a paradigm. The shared assumptions come into awareness and one is able to recognize camps, e.g. the "process" group differentiated from the "product" group. Last, one becomes conscious of people innovating, pushing the field into the future. This column introduces three researchers whom I consider to be worth noting: people who are pushing ahead into the 1980's.

Linda Flower and John R. Hayes are, it seems to me, destined to supplant the "process" paradigm with one developed from their "problem-solving" perspective. Readers of College Composition and Communication and College English will have noted their articles: "Problem-Solving Strategies and the Writing Process," CE (December, 1977), 449-462, "Writer-Based Prose: A Cognitive Basis for Problems in Writing," CE (September, 1979), 19-37 (Flower alone), and "The Cognition of Discovery: Defining a Rhetorical Problem," CCC (February, 1980), 21-32. The newest publication, by Linda S. Flower, is a freshman text, Problem-Solving Strategies for Writing (HBJ, 1980). The basic premise of the problem-solving approach is that writing is a complex cognitive skill and that in order to intervene helpfully in the writing process teachers should adopt the posture of the cognitive psychologist and see writing as a thinking problem. Since little is known about the strategies actual writers use in composing, this area of study is being actively researched. From studies of the composing process researchers can suggest heuristics to help others learn how to improve their thinking (and therefore writing) strategies. To problem-solvers, writing is a skill which can be learned and which therefore can be taught. Writers often fail to satisfy their audiences by narrating the process of their own discovery of content rather than packaging their ideas for the reader after having considered who the audience is, what the writer shares with the reader, and how the writer can affect the reader. If this sounds like traditional rhetoric, it is, with the significant difference that the problem solvers contribute specific strategies for achieving traditional goals.

Will Pitkin, a frequent presenter at CCCC, is a discourse analyst. His last two NCTE publications both appear in the March, 1977 issue of College English, "Hierarchies and the Discourse Hierarchy" and "X/Y: Some Basic Strategies of Discourse." Pitkin is concerned with the analysis of products, not the processes which created them, because he is dedicated to cracking the code, so to speak, of discourse at the paragraph level. The model of analysis Pitkin has chosen is the structuralist grammarian's analysis of words which is

generally based on the binary principle. In the second article mentioned above, Pitkin presents a tentative taxonomy of binary relationships that we use to encode and decode discourse. At the CCCC convention in Denver (1978) Pitkin had added a new dimension to his original claim that a student learning to analyze prose would improve reading and writing. The new claim is that, like sentence-combining, imitating Pitkin's structural models is a form of disciplined writing practice and one which is keyed to the logical relations which bind discourse chunks. Therefore Pitkin's practice is superior to mere grammatical linking of sentences. Like the problem-solvers, Pitkin is concerned with strategies that readers and writers use, but unlike them he is model-centered rather than interested in elaborating the strategies which writers actually use, or in devising heuristics to help students develop their actual practice. Finally, Pitkin's work shows promise for linking reading and writing; in this, and in his concern for models, he is probably the most traditional of the innovators mentioned in this article.

Joseph Williams, University of Chicago, and Rosemary Hake, Chicago State University, have engaged in consulting for federal agencies and have discovered amazing things. For instance, although teachers claim they prefer the clear, straightforward prose that warms the heart of readability enthusiasts, when they rate papers in a placement exam, papers which were rewritten in a complex, noun-heavy style, the nominal style wins readily. There are many errors which English teachers notice that other readers do not. Williams tells the anecdote of the federal agency that asked him to improve the readability of its writing. When asked if parallelism represented a problem area, the administrator replied, "You're the English teacher." Williams refused to rise to the occasion and discovered that, no, it was not a problem. Faulty parallelism did not impede understanding of content. Thus, he suggests, it is not a problem for the agency in question. By focusing on real problem areas, and not those suggested by the framework we choose, he has made gains in improving the readability of federal documents. Had he merely tried to play the English teacher role, he would not have succeeded; the agency writers would have listened politely, heard familiar admonitions, and gone on their own way. A brief summary of the recommendations made for improving readability can be read in his article "Defining Complexity" which is found in the February, 1979 issue of College English.

What these three innovators share is a willingness to go beyond the boundaries of conventional wisdom and to define in a new way the problems that have so long troubled us. In that, they are all "problem-solvers." If you're at a professional meeting and one of these people is speaking, sit in; the presentation will be worth your while.

Finally, I want to call again for contributions to this column from SOCTE members. Submissions do not have to be in the form of Research in the Teaching of English articles but may be informal and anecdotal. Address them to me c/o The English Department, Ohio University, Athens, Ohio 45701.

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CONTINUING COLUMN:
BOOKS FOR YOUNG ADULTS

What A Conference!

by
Hazel K. Davis

The program of the Assembly on Literature for Adolescents at the annual convention of the National Council of Teachers of English was varied enough to interest even the most jaded convention goer. Members got a preview of the good things in store at the annual breakfast on Saturday morning. The breakfast speaker was Robert Lipsyte, author of *THE CONTENDER* and *ONE FAT SUMMER*. Lipsyte, an admitted card-carrying member of ALAN has written a sequel to the autobiographical *ONE FAT SUMMER* which will be published this spring.

According to Lipsyte: "I think that the concept of adolescent literature, the idea of people thinking seriously and academically about adolescent literature, is probably more important now than it has ever been. The idea of that bridge between people who have just learned to read and those who may never read again, people who may never learn to read intelligently, to read creatively, to be able to make the connections in our lives, to be able to reach into the past for the truths that have been obscured, that we have to dig up again every generation, for the ability to let their minds loose to imagine, to dream, to express their dreams. I think this is what adolescent literature can do. And this, of course, is a truth we can measure." Unlike the parent or teacher, "through adolescent literature the novelist is sometimes able to change people's lives." This is what leads him on to writing for the adolescent.

Walter Wangerin, Jr., author of *THE BOOK OF THE DUN COW*, was the keynote speaker at the opening session of the assembly on Monday. In talking about fantasy Wangerin said: "Fantasy is enjoyed today on two levels. I think fantasy offers delight to a reader that maybe certain other kinds of literatures which are being written today don't, a certain kind of delight. I think fantasy answers certain needs that people have today which are not being met by the society or by the culture. Fantasy can do that because it can establish a world different from the world that people find themselves living in and get real as they would like to believe in it."

According to Wangerin fantasy literature is using certain genre which he does not see being written in other places. These genre are tragedy, epic, romance, and fairy tale. Wangerin concluded his intriguing speech with a fantastic fairy tale he made up for his younger daughter which will be published as a children's book in the near future. Look for *THISTLE*. I think you will enjoy it.

Next came a panel discussion with authors Ann Irwin, Lee Hadley, and

Dean Hughes who have published books with non-establishment presses. Some of the problems of composing and then publication were discussed.

Sue Ellen Bridgers, author of *HOME BEFORE DARK* and *ALL TOGETHER NOW*, talked about her female characters. She draws on her own family and experiences although her books are not autobiographical. It was a delight to hear this gracious Southern writer read part of her latest manuscript.

The next author to speak at the assembly was Paula Danziger, author of *THE CAT ATE MY GYMSUIT* and *CAN YOU SUE YOUR PARENTS FOR MALPRACTICE?* Ms. Danziger was her usual entertaining self. She is working on a new book, but is also spending a good deal of time helping to write a sex education program for a television network. Ms. Danziger also draws heavily from her own experiences in writing her books. As an ex-English teacher, she has a lot of empathy for her teenage readers, and for their teachers.

The Monday program concluded with a wine and cheese autograph party for participating authors, sponsored by Bantam Books. Participants were able to get their free books autographed to take back home and flash before the envious eyes of other teachers and students who were unable to attend the conference.

Tuesday morning began with a panel discussion on "The Creation of Literature Anthologies for Classroom Use" by a publisher, two authors, and an English teacher. The problems faced in trying to gather materials for anthologies makes it seem an impossible task. I am sure those teachers who heard the discussion will think twice before they question why a certain story was included in a text. Thanks to the panel, they will know.

Ouida Sebestyen, author of *WORDS BY HEART* and *FAR FROM HOME* told about her development as an author. Group discussion topics at the conference were: "Selected Adolescent Novels and Their Classic Counterparts," "Homosexuality in YA Literature," "Strategies for the Young Adult Novel in a Student-Centered Classroom," "Teaching the Adolescent Literature Course in College--Course Content, Materials, Assignments, and Evaluation," "The Young Adult Novel and Social Problems: Buying Them? Recommending Them? Teaching Them?," "Heroes in Young Adult Literature," "Subjective Criticism and the Young Adult Reader," and "Hi-Lo Books for the Reluctant or Poor Teenage Reader."

Co-Chairs Ken Donelson and Alleen Pace Nilsen can be justifiably proud of one of the most successful ALAN conferences I have attended in years. The blend of authors, group discussions, and panels held the interest of the two hundred or so participants until the final session on Tuesday afternoon. SOCTE was well-represented both as presenters on the program and as participants in the conference. I hope they, and more of you, will start making plans to attend the assembly at the annual NCTE convention in Boston, November, 1981. I am sure we are in for another good program under the able direction of ALAN President Hugh Agee of the University of Georgia.

Federal Hocking High School

CONTINUING COLUMN:
TEACHING ENGLISH IN THE ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

by
Sally Hale

Teachers at all levels have often complained about children who do not write well and do not seem interested in improving their skills. Consequently, it is a real joy to have a group of children who will ask, even before getting to the seats, "May we write stories today?", or "Can we read our writings today?" or "Do we have to read library books? I'd rather write."

Their skills and vocabulary are definitely fifth grade, but there has been improvement since September. Each child has a creative writing folder and everything goes there for sharing at some time. The writings lose some of their charm when only presented in typewritten form. Each student presents his/her own writing with much expression and effectiveness.

NUMBER POEMS

- 1 is the paper I'm using.
- 2 are the shoes on my feet.
- 3 is the size of my foot.
- 4 is the time of my piano lesson.
- 5 is two plus three.
- 6 is half a dozen.
- 7 are the pants I have.
- 8 is the page I'm on.
- 9 are the windows in our dollhouse.
- 10 is the last number in this poem.

Nancy Zoeller

- 1 is the first number in my address.
- 2 is the number of hermit crabs I own.
- 3 is the number of people living with me.
- 4 is the third number of my phone number.
- 5 is the first of my favorite number.

Lisa Wall

- 12 houses in a row on our street.
- 2 doors on each house.
- 4 windows in the front.
- 3 chimneys on one house.
- 13 houses in the neighborhood.
- 1 house is not near the rest.

Kelly Kulyk

2 is the first number in my address
 1 is a number less.
 3 was the number of my old baseball jersey.
 50 is the number of states.
 0 is my number of dates.

Brent Erb

1 is the number of bodies I have.
 2 is the number of bodies of mice I had.
 5 is the number of big bodies of water there are.
 50 is the number of bodies Ayatollah Khomeini invited for Christmas.
 Septillion is the number of cells I have, I think.

George Whang

SEASONAL SENSES

Halloween is orange and white.
 It sounds like people knocking on doors.
 It smells like burning candles.
 It looks like ghosts and goblins.
 It tastes like candy.
 It makes me feel full.

Michelle Wheeler

Halloween is black and orange.
 It sounds like laughing kids.
 It smells like yummy candy.
 It looks like a scary night.
 It tastes like sweets.
 It makes me feel scary and nice at the same time.

Tracey Burchett

Halloween is pink polkadot and tutti-frutti.
 It sounds like BOO! Eeeeeeeek!
 It smells like bubble gum.
 It looks like witches and ghosts.
 It tastes like candy.
 It makes me feel like a sweet tooth.

Andy Hoffman

Halloween is orange and black.
 It sounds like Boveeoooo!
 It smells like hot pumpkin pie.
 It looks like an old house.
 It tastes like candy.
 It makes me feel like I'm sick.

Bob Ward

Halloween is orange and black.
 It sounds like ghosts and goblins.
 It smells like candy.
 It looks all spooky and scary.
 It tastes like homemade pumpkin pie.
 It makes me feel high in the sky.

Amy Ashcraft

TWO-WORD POEMS

Winter time
 Summer time
 Fall time
 Spring time
 They're fun
 All fun
 Winter time
 Cold, snowy
 Summer time
 Hot, relaxing
 Fall time
 Cool, refreshing
 Spring time
 Warm, beautiful.

Matthew Wickham

Pygmy Joe
 Very short
 Big jaws
 No warts
 Small paws
 Boned head
 "Ooma, ooma,"
 He says.

Hugh Greene

Get home
 Watch TV,
 Eat supper,
 Play outside,
 Come in.
 Take bath
 Watch TV.
 Bedtime.

Brian Brooks

STORIES

Bases Loaded by George Whang

The seventh game of the World Series was tied up three apiece! The two great teams were the Pittsburgh Poodles against the New York Smartie-Aleks. I, Spike Spitball, am on the Smartie-Aleks pitching mound throwing a no-hit game for them. However, I did walk three in a row.

Now I am throwing to Bill Catdog with a full count on him, two out. I threw my curve ball, fork ball, screw ball, sinker ball, and fast ball, all rolled into one. "Strike three!" called the ump. The inning was over.

Finally, we went into extra innings. It is the tenth at the top of the batting order for New York.

Willie Rednose was up. The pitch...ball one...ball two...ball three... take your base. Willie was on first base. Now Bobby Murcer was up. He got a single to right field. Then Oscar Gamble got a line drive single up the middle to load the bases. Then Reggie Jinkson hit a line drive smash and broke the nose of Lee Lucy and got an inside the park grand slam homer. Lou Pinellapi got a ground rule double. Craig Nettles bunted him to third.

Then Bobbie Brown hit a sacrifice fly to make the score 8-3. Rick Cerone singled. Bucky Bent popped out.

The next inning the Poodles had to catch up or they would lose. I struck out the first batter. I struck out the next batter.

Now it is all up to Willie Startrek. Strike one! Strike two! Ball one, ball two, ball three. Now it was a full count. I threw my curve ball, fork ball, screw ball, sinker ball, and fast ball all rolled into one. Willie hit it at Reggie Jinkson, Willie headed for second. Reggie Jinkson had a great

throw to Bucky Bent.....Everybody in the Funkydome was waiting for the umpire's call. He yelled, "You're OUT!!"

The New York Smartie-Aleks were the World Champions. I, Spike Spitball, proudly became the MVP for my no-hitter game.

Mud Monster Returns by Hugh Greene

One day in Shaky Creek, it was a nice day...or was it? Suddenly, there was an explosion. A lump of mud was rising and forming into a monster.

The monster had been here before. But could Superman stop it again? This one has large quantities of Kryptonite, and, oh, no, Superman is on vacation.

It's up to me now. But how could I stop it? It is almost indestructible.

Suddenly, I knew what to do. At the top of my lungs I yelled, "SHAZOOM!!!"

Guess what? That monster is really in for it. I had just turned into the most powerful pygmy, Captain Dynamite.

I flew through the Shaky Creek area. But how was I to catch him? I thought of an idea. I yelled "SHAZOOM!!!" again and stepped out of the way. The lightning hit him and he turned into stone.

The Mud Monster was no longer a threat to Shaky Creek.....thanks to SHAZOOM!!!!

Recipe for Le Peu Stew by Amy Ashcraft

Ingredients:

8 carrots
4 noses
3 beef patties
1 chicken bouillon cube
1 baby Christmas tree
(for deodorizing)
1 fresh skunk
2 onions
1 stalk celery
water

Directions:

1. Dice the carrots, slice the onions, and chop the celery.
2. Put the above into the blender with 2 cups water and the bouillon cube.
3. Heat the burner to hot and fill a pot with water.
4. Plop the stuff in the blender, the skunk, and the Christmas tree.
5. Add the beef patties and noses.
6. Boil hard for 2 hours.
7. This stew will serve 6 people with strong stomachs.

CONTINUING COLUMN:
TEACHING ENGLISH IN THE JUNIOR HIGH/MIDDLE SCHOOL

Using Photography to Teach
Point of View and Plot in Literature

by
Ruth Sharrer

I use photography to help teach literature concepts. I could have chosen other methods to teach these concepts, but this was an approach the students enjoyed. The idea of using a camera to learn literature intrigued them. The students had trouble with point of view. They could define it, but they really did not understand why this could influence the story.

I started by dividing the class into groups, usually composed of four students. I try to make sure there is one student in each who can provide leadership. Each group then selects a secretary who keeps written records of the group's activities and writes, with the group's help, the final report. We then discuss possible "characters" they can become. I usually offer some suggestions like a small child, a giant, an old man, or someone who is handicapped. Often they will suggest other possibilities. The most unusual I've had is to be a trashcan.

After all the groups have decided what character they will assume, we then talk about how this character would "see" the things around him. For instance, a small child would see things from his height, which would mean a lot of looking up. After we have discussed the limitations placed on their character, the groups then decide what their characters would be likely to see and how they would see it. They compose a list of 12-15 possible pictures which I then go over with them. They are then ready to take the actual pictures. We usually take black and white pictures because both the film and processing are cheaper. To cover this cost, we sometimes have bake sales.

After the pictures are developed, the students mount them on cardboard with a caption for each. Each group then writes up an explanation of the "character" and how being that character affected what they could see, could not see, and how they looked at things, in other words, point of view. There are limitations to this assignment, but the students generally have a better idea of point of view, and they have a good time doing it.

I have also used photography to help illustrate plot steps and chronological order with eighth grade students. The procedure for setting up the groups is the same. This assignment is not as difficult as the other, but it usually leads to a writing assignment also. We start by discussing what plot is and what chronological order is. Then I tell them they are going

to tell a story through pictures. Each group decides on a story line. If they can not think of one, I offer suggestions. They write up a brief outline of their story, and, since they only have twelve pictures to take, they decide what twelve pictures are most necessary to telling the story. They have a lot of fun staging their pictures and using other classmates in them. After the pictures are developed, they mount them on cardboard with no captions. After all groups have finished, each student has to choose one of the "picture stories" and write a story based on the plot steps shown. We then read these in class. It is interesting to see how closely these stories come to the original group's story.

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